

SAND
—
CONSUELO

2

GRAD
848
S2cn
t
v.2

POTTER

CONSUELO

BY GEORGE SAND

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY FRANK H. POTTER

IN FOUR VOLUMES

VOL. II

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
1889

Copyright, 1889
BY DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

All rights reserved

PRESS OF
Rockwell and Churchill
BOSTON

CONSUELO.

CHAPTER I.

“ALBERT’S story can be finished in a few words, dear Porporina, for unless I were to repeat what you have already heard, I have almost nothing more to tell you. My cousin’s conduct during the eighteen months that I have spent here has been a continual repetition of the eccentricities which you already know.

“Only, Albert’s pretended recollection of what he had been and what he had seen assumed a frightful appearance of reality when he began to display a peculiar and really marvellous faculty of which you have, perhaps, heard, and in which I did not believe until I saw the proof which he gave of it. This faculty is called in other countries, they say, second sight, and those who possess it are objects of great veneration to superstitious people. As for me, who do not know what to think of it, and who will not undertake to give you a reasonable explanation of it, I find in it one more motive for never becoming the wife of a man who would see all my actions, though he were a hundred leagues from me, and who could almost read my thoughts. Such a woman ought to be

at least a saint, and how could one be that with a man who seems given over to the devil?"

"You seem able to jest about everything," said Consuelo, "and I admire the playful way in which you speak of things which make my hair stand on end. What is this second sight?"

"Albert sees and hears what no one else can see or hear. When any one whom he likes is coming, although nobody knows of it, he announces it and goes to meet them. In the same way, he shuts himself up when he feels the approach of any one distasteful to him.

"One day when he was walking in a mountain-path with my father, he stopped suddenly and made a great detour through the rocks and the underbrush, so as not to pass a certain place about which, however, there was nothing peculiar. They came back by the road a little later, and Albert again went through the same performance. My father, who noticed it, pretended to have lost something, and tried to lead him to the foot of a pine which seemed to be the object of his repugnance. Not only would Albert not go near it, but he even kept out of the shadow which it cast across the path; and when my father passed beneath it he seemed to suffer extremely. At last, when my father stopped directly under it, Albert cried out, and called to him to come away. But he refused for a long time to explain his fancy, and it was only in response to the prayers of the whole family that he declared that the tree marked a grave, and that a great

crime had been committed there. The chaplain thought that if Albert knew of any murder which had been committed in that spot it was his duty to make an investigation, that he might give Christian burial to the neglected bones.

“‘Beware of what you do,’ said Albert, with that mocking yet sad smile which he sometimes wears. ‘The man, the woman and the child that you will find there were Hussites, and it was the drunkard Wenceslas who had them butchered by his soldiers one night when he was hiding in our woods, and was afraid of being seen and betrayed by them.’

“They never again spoke to my cousin of this incident; but my uncle, who wished to make sure whether it was an inspiration or a fancy of his, had a search made by night at the spot pointed out by my father. They found there the skeletons of a man, a woman and a child. The man was covered with one of those enormous wooden shields which the Hussites carried, and which can be easily recognized by the chalice which is carved upon them, encircled by this device in Latin: ‘O death! how bitter is the remembrance of thee to the wicked; but acceptable is thy sentence unto him whose actions are just and ordered in fear of his latter end.’¹

“They bore these bones to a more secluded part of the forest, and when Albert passed the tree a few

¹“O mors! quam est amara memoria tua hominibus injustis, viro quieta cujus omnes res fiunt ordinate et ad hoc.” Ecclesiasticus xii. 1, 3, slightly altered.

days later, my father noticed that he showed no repugnance towards walking over this place, which had been covered with stones and sand, so that nothing appeared altered. He did not recollect the agitation which he had felt on the former occasion, and had difficulty in recalling it when reminded of it.

“‘You must be mistaken,’ he said to my father, ‘and it was another place in which I was warned. I am sure there is nothing here, for I feel neither cold nor pain nor a trembling of my limbs.’

“My aunt was inclined to attribute this power of divination to a special favor of Providence; but Albert is so mournful, tormented and unhappy, that it is difficult to conceive why Providence should have granted him so fatal a gift. If I believed in the devil, I should be much more inclined to agree with the chaplain, who lays all Albert’s hallucinations upon his shoulders. My Uncle Christian, who is the most sensible and firm in his religion of us all, finds a very probable explanation of all these things. He believes that in spite of the care taken by the Jesuits during and after the Thirty Years’ War to burn all the heretics in Bohemia, and especially those about the Castle of the Giants, and in spite of a careful search made everywhere by our chaplain after the death of my Aunt Wanda, some historical documents of the times of the Hussites must have remained in a hiding-place which no one knows about, and that Albert has discovered them.

“My uncle thinks that the reading of these danger-

ous writings has strongly impressed his diseased imagination, and that he innocently attributes to his supernatural recollection of a former existence the impression which he has received of many facts which are now unknown, but which are fully recorded in these manuscripts. In this way we can explain naturally all the stories which he has told us, and his inexplicable disappearances for days and even weeks, — for I must tell you that this incident has been repeated several times, and that it is impossible to believe that he leaves the castle. Whenever he has disappeared in this way, he has remained undiscoverable, and we are sure that no peasant has ever given him food or shelter. He knows that he has fits of lethargy which keep him shut up in his room for whole days. If they burst open the door and make a noise near him he is thrown into convulsions, and so they carefully abstain from it. They leave him in his ecstasy. Extraordinary things take place in his mind on these occasions, but no sound nor outward agitation reveals them ; we only know it from what he tells us afterwards. When he recovers from these attacks, he seems relieved and restored to reason ; but little by little his excitement returns and increases until the recurrence of his illness. He can apparently foresee the length of these attacks, for when they are to be long he goes away, or takes refuge in this hiding-place, which must be in some cave in the mountain or some vault in the castle of which he alone knows. So far, we have not been able to dis-

cover it. This is all the more difficult because it is impossible to watch him, for it makes him dangerously ill to follow him, to spy upon or even to question him. So they have made up their minds to leave him absolutely free. Since then these absences, which frightened us so greatly at first, have come to be regarded by us as favorable crises in his illness. When they occur, my aunt suffers and my uncle prays, and as for me, I confess that I have become considerably hardened in regard to them. Excessive grief has brought on weariness and disgust. I would rather die than marry this maniac. I recognize his fine qualities, but although it may seem to you that I ought not to care for his eccentricities, since they are the result of his illness, I confess to you that I am irritated by them, as being a thorn in my life and in that of my family."

"This seems somewhat unjust, dear baroness," said Consuelo. "I can easily understand now that you are unwilling to become Count Albert's wife, but I cannot understand why you should withdraw your interest from him."

"It is because I cannot free my mind from the impression that there is something voluntary in the poor man's madness. It is certain that he has great strength of character, and that under many circumstances he can exercise extraordinary control over himself. He can postpone his attacks. I have seen him master them when we did not seem inclined to take them seriously. On the other hand, when he finds us timid

and credulous, he appears to wish to create an impression on us by his extravagances, and takes advantage of our weakness for him. That is why I am irritated by him, and often wish that his master Beelzebub would come for him once for all and rid us of him."

"These are very cruel jests," said Consuelo, "in regard to so unhappy a man. This mental disease is to me marvellous and poetic rather than repulsive."

"As you like, dear Porporina," replied Amelia. "Admire this sorcery as much as you please, if you can believe in it. But I am like our chaplain, who commends his soul to God, and refrains from trying to understand it. I take refuge in the bosom of Reason, and do not attempt to interpret what must have, after all, a very rational explanation which we do not as yet know. The only certain thing in my cousin's unfortunate destiny is that his reason has completely left him, and imagination has taken its place. And if I must speak clearly, and say the word which my uncle spoke when he was in tears at the feet of Maria Theresa, who is satisfied with no half confidences, Albert of Rudolstadt is mad—deranged, if you like the word better."

A deep sigh was Consuelo's only reply. At that moment Amelia seemed to her a hateful and hard-hearted creature. She tried to find an excuse for her by considering what she must have suffered in eighteen months of a life filled with such sad and varied emotions. Then, recalling her own misfortune, she thought, "Ah, why cannot I lay Anzoletto's faults to the door

of madness? If he had become deranged by the delights and disappointments of his debut, I feel that I should not have loved him less ; and if I only knew that his ingratitude and faithlessness sprang from insanity, I should adore him as before, and fly to his succor."

Several days went by and Albert gave no confirmation, either by word or action, of his cousin's affirmations concerning his mental condition. But one day, when the chaplain had unintentionally irritated him, he began to speak very incoherently, and as if he had perceived it himself, he left the drawing-room abruptly, and retired to his own apartment. They thought that he would remain there for a long time, but an hour later he returned, pale and prostrated, moved from chair to chair, circling about Consuelo without appearing to pay more attention to her than on other days, and finally took refuge in the deep recess of a window, where he leaned his head upon his hands and remained motionless.

It was the hour of Amelia's music lesson, and she wished to take it, as she murmured to Consuelo, that she might drive away that sinister face which killed all her gayety and filled the room with the odor of the tomb.

"I think," said Consuelo, "that we should do better to go up to your room ; your spinet will suffice for the accompaniment. If it is true that Count Albert does not like music, why increase his sufferings, and consequently those of your aunt and uncle ?"

Amelia yielded to this consideration, and they went together to her room, the door of which they left open because they found smoke there. Amelia wished to have her own way, as usual, and sing elaborate airs. But Consuelo, who began to show some strictness, made her try very simple and serious motives from Palestrina's religious compositions. The young baroness yawned, became impatient, and at last declared that the music was barbarous and uninteresting.

"That is because you do not understand it," said Consuelo ; "let me sing you a few phrases to show you how admirably it is written for the voice, while it is sublime in thought and feeling."

She sat down at the spinet and began to sing. It was the first time that she had awakened the echoes of the old castle, and the sonority of the high and bare walls gave her a pleasure to which she entirely abandoned herself. She had not used her voice since the last evening she had sung at the San-Samuel, when she had fainted away, crushed by fatigue and anguish ; but instead of being injured by all her trials and sufferings, it was more beautiful, more wonderful, more brilliant than ever. Amelia was delighted and appalled. She was realizing that she knew nothing, and perhaps could never learn anything, when suddenly Albert's pale and thoughtful face appeared in the middle of the room before the young girls, and remained motionless and singularly affected until the end of the piece. When Consuelo saw him, which was not till then, she was a little frightened. But

Albert, falling upon his knees, and raising to her eyes streaming with tears, cried in Spanish, without the least German accent, —

“Oh, Consuelo, Consuelo, I have found you at last !”

“Consuelo !” cried the astonished girl in the same language ; “why do you call me thus, my lord ?”

“I call you consolation,” replied Albert, still in Spanish, “because a consolation has been promised to me, and you are the consolation which God has at last granted to my lonely and miserable life.”

“I did not suppose,” said Amelia, angrily, “that music could produce so prodigious an effect upon my cousin. Nina’s voice is worthy to perform miracles, I admit ; but I wish to suggest to both of you that it would be more polite to me, and more proper in every way, for you to speak in a language which I can understand.”

Albert did not appear to hear a word of what his betrothed said. He remained upon his knees, looking at Consuelo with indescribable surprise and happiness, still repeating in a tender tone, “Consuelo, Consuelo !”

“What is it that he calls you ?” said Amelia to her companion, sharply.

“He is asking me for a Spanish air which I do not know,” said Consuelo, deeply moved ; “but I think we had better stop now, for music seems to agitate him greatly to-day.”

She rose to go out.

“Consuelo,” Albert went on in Spanish, “if you withdraw yourself from me, my life will be ended, for I shall never come back to earth.”

As he said this, he fell fainting at her feet, and the two girls, terribly frightened, called the servants to bear him away and take care of him.

CHAPTER II.

COUNT ALBERT was laid gently upon his bed ; and while the young girls went in search of the canoness, one of the servants flew to summon the chaplain, who was in some measure the family physician, while the other sought for Count Christian, who had given orders that he should be notified whenever his son was indisposed. But in spite of all their haste, before they could reach Albert he had disappeared. They found his door open, his bed scarce disordered by the short rest which he had taken upon it and his chamber in its wonted order. They sought for him everywhere, and, as always happened under the same circumstances, found him nowhere ; after which they entered upon one of those periods of mournful resignation of which Amelia had told Consuelo, and seemed to be waiting with a silent terror which they no longer expressed in words for the longed-for but uncertain return of the eccentric young man.

Although Consuelo would have preferred not to relate to Albert's family the strange scene which had taken place in Amelia's room, the young baroness made haste to tell of it, and to paint in lively colors the sudden and violent effect which Porporina's singing had produced upon her cousin.

"It is quite evident that music does him harm," said the chaplain.

"In that case," replied Consuelo, "I will not sing, and when I work with the baroness, we will take care to shut ourselves up so carefully that not a sound can reach Count Albert's ear."

"It will be very annoying for you, my dear young lady," said the canoness. "Ah, I wish that I could make your stay here more agreeable!"

"I wish to share in your sorrows and your joys," replied Consuelo, "and I ask no other happiness than that I may be allowed to take part in them by your confidence and your friendship."

"You are a noble girl," said the canoness, holding out to her a hand which was dry and shining as yellow ivory. "But listen," she added; "I do not believe that music really does harm to my dear Albert. From what Amelia has told me of the scene this morning, I see, on the contrary, that he takes too acute a pleasure in it, and perhaps his suffering only came because your admirable singing was ended sooner than he wished. What did he say to you in Spanish? It is a language which he speaks perfectly, they tell me, as well as several others, which he learned in his travels with extraordinary facility. When we asked him how he could remember so many different languages, he replied that he knew them before he was born, and was only recalling them, having spoken one twelve hundred years ago, another when he was at the crusades, and I hardly know what else. Since we must

conceal nothing from you, dear signora, you will hear strange stories of what he calls his former existences. But translate to me into our German, which you already speak very well, the sense of what he said to you in your own language, which we none of us understand."

Consuelo felt a moment's embarrassment, which she could not understand. Still, she resolved to tell almost the whole truth by saying that Count Albert had asked her to continue singing and not to go away, and had said that she gave him great consolation.

"Consolation!" cried the acute Amelia; "did he use that word? You know, aunt, how significant it is in my cousin's mouth."

"True, it is a word which is often on his lips," replied Wenceslawa, "and which has a prophetic signification for him. But his employing it in this case seems to me entirely natural."

"But what was the word which he said to you so many times, dear Porporina?" said Amelia, obstinately. "It seemed to me that he repeated to you several times a word which I have forgotten in my agitation."

"I did not understand it myself," said Consuelo, making a great effort to prevaricate.

"My dear Nina," said Amelia in her ear, "you are wise and cautious, but I am not altogether stupid, and I think I understood very well that you are the mystic consolation which the vision promised Albert in his

thirtieth year. Do not try to conceal from me that you understood this better than I; it is a heavenly mission of which I am not jealous."

"Listen, dear Porporina," said the canoness, after pondering for a few moments; "we have always believed that Albert, when he disappeared from us in a manner which might well be called magical, was concealed not far from us, perhaps in the house, even, in some secret retreat known to none but himself. I do not know, but it seems to me that if you were to begin to sing he would hear it and come to us."

"If I thought" — said Consuelo, quite ready to obey.

"But suppose Albert is near us and the music increases his delirium," said the jealous Amelia.

"Well," said Count Christian, "it is an experiment which we ought to make. I have heard that the incomparable Farinelli was able to dissipate the melancholy of the King of Spain by his singing, as young David could quiet the madness of Saul by the sound of his harp. Try, generous Porporina; so fine a soul as yours must exercise a beneficent influence on all around it."

Consuelo, who was deeply moved, sat down at the clavichord and sang a Spanish hymn in honor of "Our Lady of Consolation," which her mother had taught her in her childhood, and which began with the words, "Consuelo de mi alma" ("Consolation of my soul.") She sang with so pure a voice and so sincere an expression of devotion that her old hosts almost

forgot the cause of their anxiety, and were filled with hope and faith. A profound silence reigned within and without the castle. All the doors and windows had been opened that Consuelo's voice might reach as far as possible, and the moon illumined with its greenish light the casements of the large windows. All was still, and a sort of religious serenity had taken the place of their mental anguish, when a profound sigh, which seemed to proceed from a human breast, replied to the last sounds of Consuelo's voice. The sigh was so long drawn and distinct that all present noticed it, even Baron Frederick, who awoke to ask if some one had spoken to him. They all turned pale, and looked at each other as if to say, "It was not I; was it you?" Amelia could not restrain a cry, and Consuelo, who thought that the sigh came from just beside her, although she was at the clavichord apart from the rest of the family, was so frightened that she could not speak.

"Good heavens!" cried the terrified canoness, "did you hear that sigh, which seemed to come from the depths of the earth?"

"Say rather, dear aunt," cried Amelia, "that it passed above our heads like the night wind."

"Some bat, attracted by the light, must have passed through the room while we were absorbed by the music, and we heard the faint sound of its wings as it flew out of the window."

This was the opinion expressed by the chaplain, whose teeth, however, were chattering with fright.

"Perhaps it was Albert's dog," said Count Christian.

"Cynabre is not here. Wherever Albert is, Cynabre is always with him." Some one here uttered a strange sigh. "If I dared go to the window, I would see if some one was listening in the garden ; but I could not find courage to do it if my life depended on it."

"For a person so free from prejudices as you are," murmured Consuelo, trying to smile, "for a little French philosopher, you are not very brave, dear baroness. I will try to have more courage."

"Do not go there, my dear," replied Amelia, aloud, "and do not pretend to be brave, for you are pale as death and ready to faint."

"What trifles divert your sorrow, dear Amelia," said Count Christian, going to the window with a firm step.

He looked outside, but saw no one, and closed the window calmly, saying, —

"It seems that real ills are not cruel enough for the lively imaginations of women ; they have to add to them the creations of their fancy. Surely there was nothing mysterious in this sigh. One of us, moved by the signora's noble voice and immense talent, breathed this sort of exclamation from the depths of his heart without knowing it. Perhaps it was I, and yet I am not conscious of it. Ah, Porporina, if you do not succeed in curing Albert, at least you will pour a heavenly balm into other wounds as deep as his !"

The words of this good old man, who was so calm and patient amid the domestic afflictions which overwhelmed him, were themselves a heavenly balm, and Consuelo felt their effect. She was tempted to fall on her knees before him and ask him to bless her as Porpora had done when she left him, and as Marcello had done on that happy day from which dated all the misery and misfortune of her life.

CHAPTER III.

SEVERAL days went by without any news of Albert, and Consuelo, to whom the situation was terribly trying, was astonished at seeing the Rudolstadt family display neither despair nor impatience under so frightful a misfortune. The frequent repetition of great anxiety produces an apparent apathy or real callousness which wounds and almost irritates a mind whose sensibilities are not yet dulled by long-continued grief. Consuelo, to whom these painful impressions and inexplicable events seemed a sort of nightmare, was astonished to see that the habits of the household were scarcely changed; that the canoness was as vigilant, the baron as fond of hunting, the chaplain as devoted to his religious duties and Amelia as gay and mocking as ever. The playful vivacity of the young baroness was what especially shocked her. She could not understand how any one could laugh and frolic when she herself could scarcely read or sew.

Just at this time the canoness was embroidering an altar-cloth for the chapel of the castle. It was a marvel of patience, of skill and of neatness. She would go the rounds of the house, and then return and sit down at her work, if only to add a few stitches, until new duties should call her to the lofts, the kitchen or

the cellar. It was wonderful to see the importance which she attached to all these trifling matters, and how this slender creature trotted about with her quick, brisk little steps, always staid and dignified, but never slow, into every corner of her mimic empire, going over it all a hundred times a day. What also appeared strange to Consuelo was the respect and admiration which were paid, both in the house and in the neighborhood, to this almost menial occupation in which the worthy woman took a loving and jealous interest. To see her scrupulously settling the smallest accounts, one would have thought her sordid and parsimonious; yet she was noble and generous at the bottom of her heart, and on great occasions. But her finest qualities, and especially her maternal tenderness, which made Consuelo love and revere her so greatly, would not have been enough to cause the others to make her the heroine of the family. Without her watchful control of the thousand details of the household affairs, she would not have been recognized for what she was, — a woman of sound sense and fine character. There was not a day when the count, the baron or the chaplain did not exclaim, “What wisdom, what courage, what strength of mind the canoness possesses!”

Amelia herself, who did not perceive the truly exalted character of her aunt’s life, could find no fault with her in this respect, which alone seemed to Consuelo to cast a shadow on the bright light which shone from the pure and loving heart of the hunchback Wenceslawa. To the zingarella, born on the

highway, and left alone in the world with no master nor protector save her own genius, such care, activity, and anxiety for such wretched objects as the care and preservation of certain goods and provisions seemed an absurd occupation for the mind. She, who neither possessed nor desired any of the riches of the earth, grieved at seeing a noble soul voluntarily waste itself in caring for wheat, wine, wood, hemp, cattle and furniture. If she had been offered all these goods, which most people covet, she would have asked instead a moment of her former happiness, her rags, her bright sky, her pure love and her liberty on the lagoons of Venice, — a bitter yet precious memory which seemed all the brighter as she got farther from it and deeper into that frozen sphere which is called real life.

She could not help feeling sad when she saw the canoness, followed by Hans, take a great bunch of keys at nightfall, and go her rounds through all the buildings and courtyards to close every door and look in every spot where a robber could have crept, as if no one could sleep in safety behind those formidable walls until the water of the torrent, imprisoned behind a neighboring dam, should rush roaring through the moat while the gates were barred and the drawbridge was raised. Consuelo, on her distant journeys, had so often slept by the roadside with no shelter but a corner of her mother's ragged cloak! She had so often hailed the dawn on the white pavement of Venice without fearing for her

virtue, the only possession she cared to preserve! "Alas!" she said, "how greatly are these people to be pitied for having so much to take care of! Security is the object which they pursue night and day, and they seek it so earnestly that they have not time to find it or to enjoy it." Like Amelia, she had already begun to weary of her gloomy prison, that sombre Castle of the Giants, where the sun itself seemed afraid to penetrate. But instead of the balls, gowns and admiration for which the young baroness longed, Consuelo dreamed of a furrow, a bush or a bark for a palace, confined by no boundary but the horizon and with no pageant but the starry heaven.

Consuelo was compelled by the coldness of the climate and the closing of the castle to give up her Venetian habit of sitting up part of the night and rising late in the morning; and after many hours of sleeplessness, agitation and disagreeable dreams she succeeded in becoming accustomed to the habits of the house. She compensated herself by venturing alone on some early walks on the neighboring mountain. The gates were opened and the bridge lowered at the first peep of dawn, and while Amelia, who spent half her nights in reading novels by stealth, slept until the call of the breakfast-bell, Porporina went to breathe the morning air and walk amid the dewy plants of the forest.

One morning, when she was going down very quietly on tiptoe, so as not to awake any one, she made a wrong turning amid the numberless stairways and end-

less passages of the castle, which she hardly as yet knew. Astray in this labyrinth of galleries and passages, she went through a sort of vestibule which she did not recognize, but by which she expected to find her way into the garden. But instead, she came to the door of a little chapel, faintly lit from above by a skylight in the roof which cast a dim light on the middle of the floor, but left the sides in mysterious darkness. The sun was still below the horizon and the morning gray and misty. Consuelo thought at first that she was in the castle chapel, where she had already heard mass one Sunday. She knew that that chapel opened on the gardens ; but before crossing it to go out she wished to salute the sanctuary of prayer, and knelt upon the first flag-stone. However, as often happens to artists, who allow themselves to be impressed by external objects in spite of their efforts to abstract their thoughts, her prayer did not absorb her sufficiently to prevent her from casting a curious glance about her, and she soon perceived that she was not in the chapel, but in a place where she had never before been. Neither the vessels nor the ornaments were the same. Although this unknown chapel was small, it was still difficult to distinguish objects ; and what struck Consuelo the most was a whitish statue, kneeling before the altar in the cold and stiff attitude which was formerly imparted to those which decorated tombs. She thought that she must be in a spot reserved for the burial of some distinguished ancestors, and as she had become somewhat timid and superstitious since

her residence in Bohemia, she cut short her prayer and rose to retire.

But as she was casting a last timid glance upon this figure, kneeling a few steps from her, she distinctly saw the statue unclasp its two hands of stone and slowly make a sign of the cross as it breathed a deep sigh.

Consuelo started back in affright, and yet she could not take her staring eyes from the terrible figure. What strengthened her in the belief that it was a statue was that it did not seem to hear her cry of fright, but clasped its two great hands again without appearing to have any relation to the outside world.

CHAPTER IV.

IF the ingenious and prolific Anne Radcliffe were in the place of the frank and awkward narrator of this very truthful history, she would not neglect so good an occasion, kind reader, to lead you through trap-doors, corridors, winding staircases, darkness and underground passages during half-a-dozen fine and fascinating volumes, to reveal to you only in the seventh the key to her ingenious mysteries. But the strong-minded reader whom we have undertaken to amuse might not welcome so warmly the innocent stratagems of the novelist. Besides, as it would be very difficult to make him believe in them, we will tell as quickly as possible the answer to all our riddles. To explain two of them at once, we will confess that Consuelo, as soon as she recovered her presence of mind, recognized in the animated statue which she had before her eyes the old count, who was saying his morning prayers in his oratory, and in the sigh of grief which had just escaped him unconsciously, as often happens to old men, the same diabolical sigh which she thought she heard at her elbow one evening when she had sung the hymn to Our Lady of Consolation.

Somewhat ashamed of her fright, Consuelo remained motionless out of respect for the count and for fear of disturbing so fervent a prayer. Nothing could be

more solemn or touching than to see this old man kneeling upon the bare stones, offering up his heart to God at the dawn of day, and lost in a sort of heavenly rapture which closed his senses to all perception of the physical world. His noble face displayed no painful emotion. A fresh breeze, coming in by the door which Consuelo had left ajar, shook his crown of silvery hair, and his broad brow had the yellowish sheen of old marble. Clad in a white woollen dressing-gown of ancient fashion, which somewhat resembled a monk's robe, and made great folds, stiff and heavy, over his withered limbs, he had precisely the appearance of a statue on a tomb, and when he became motionless again, Consuelo had to glance at him a second time not to fall into her former error.

After looking at him attentively, going a little to one side to see him the better, she began to ask herself involuntarily, in spite of her admiration and her affection for him, whether the sort of prayer which this old man was making to God could be very efficacious for the cure of his unfortunate son. Could it be that a soul so submissive to the rules of dogma and the inflexible decrees of fate had ever possessed the warmth, intelligence and zeal which Albert needed to find in his father? Albert also had a mystical organization. He, too, had led a pious and contemplative life. But from all that Amelia had told her, and from what she had seen herself in the few days which she had spent at the castle, she was convinced that Albert had never found the guide, the counsellor and friend

who could control his imagination, regulate the strength of his feelings and modify the fiery excesses of his virtue. She realized that he must have felt himself alone and regarded himself as a stranger in the midst of a family which persisted in thwarting him or pitying him in silence, as if he were a heretic or a madman ; she felt it herself from the sort of impatience which was aroused in her by this impassable and interminable prayer addressed to Heaven, as if to charge it alone with the task which they ought to have undertaken themselves, of seeking the fugitive, of finding him, persuading him and bringing him back. For a terrible feeling of despair and an inexpressible agony could alone cause so affectionate and good a man to fly thus from his family, to make him utterly forget himself and to take from him even the consciousness of the tortures which he must inflict upon the beings who were dearest to him.

The resolution which they had taken never to contradict him and to appear calm in spite of their terrors seemed to the firm and clear intelligence of Consuelo a culpable neglect or a gross error. It showed that sort of pride and selfishness which a narrow religious belief must inspire in persons who consent to be blinded by intolerance, and who believe that one road alone, marked out by the hand of a priest, can lead them to heaven.

“Merciful God !” said Consuelo, praying inwardly, “can it be that this noble soul, so ardent, so charitable, so free from human passions, can be less pre-

cious in Thy sight than those patient and slothful souls who disregard the injustice of this world, and feel no indignation when they see justice and truth despised upon earth? Did the devil inspire this young man, who in his childhood gave his playthings and his trinkets to the children of the poor, and who at the first dawn of his intelligence wished to bestow all that he had to succor the ills of humanity? And these kind and benevolent people who show their pity for misfortune by idle tears and trifling alms, are they wise to believe that they can win heaven by prayers and submission to the pope and the emperor, rather than by noble deeds and great sacrifices? No, Albert is not mad. A voice from my heart cries to me that he is the purest type of a just and holy man which has ever come from the hands of nature. And if painful dreams and strange illusions have obscured the clearness of his intellect, if he has become deranged, in short, as they believe, this deplorable result has been brought about by blind contradiction, absence of sympathy and loneliness of heart. I saw the cell where Tasso was imprisoned as mad, and I thought that perhaps he was only exasperated by injustice. In the drawing-rooms of Venice I heard those great saints of Christianity, whose touching story made me weep when a child, spoken of as madmen; their miracles were called jugglery, their revelations the dreams of a disordered imagination. By what right do these people — this pious old man and this timid canoness — pronounce upon their child this

sentence of shame and reprobation which should be inflicted only on the infirm or the wicked? Mad! Madness is horrible and repulsive! It is a punishment of God for great crimes; and can a man become mad from too much virtue? I thought that if one sank beneath the weight of undeserved misfortune, it entitled him to the respect as well as the pity of men. Suppose I had become mad and blasphemed on that terrible day when I saw Anzoletto in the arms of another; should I have lost all right to the counsel, the encouragement and the spiritual aid of my brother Christians? Would they have driven me out or left me wandering on the highway, saying, 'There is no cure for her; let us give her alms, but not speak to her, for she has suffered so much that she can no longer understand anything'? Yet it is thus that they treat this unfortunate Count Albert. They feed, clothe, care for him; they give him, in short, the alms of a puerile attention. But they do not talk to him; they are silent when he questions them, and they hang their heads or turn them away when he tries to persuade them. They let him depart when the dread of solitude calls him to still deeper solitudes, and they await his return, praying God to watch over him and bring him back safe and sound, as if the ocean were between him and those who love him! And yet they think he is not far off. They make me sing to arouse him if he is in his lethargic sleep behind some thick wall or within the trunk of some neighboring tree. Yet still they have not explored all the secrets of this

old building ; they have not dug to the very bowels of the earth ! Ah, if I were the father or the aunt of Albert, I should not have left stone upon stone, nor should a tree of the forest have remained standing until I had found him ! ”

Lost in these thoughts, Consuelo had gone noiselessly out of Count Christian’s oratory, and had found, without knowing how, a gate which opened into the country. She wandered amid the forest paths, and sought out the wildest and roughest, guided by a romantic and heroic instinct, which made her hope that she might find Albert. No vulgar attraction, no shadow of an imprudent fancy, inspired her with this adventurous design. Albert filled her imagination and was the subject of all her dreams, it is true ; but in her eyes it was not a handsome and enthusiastic young man whom she was seeking in these desert spots, to see him and find herself alone with him ; it was a noble unfortunate whom in her pure zeal she believed that she could save, or at least calm. She would have sought in the same way for an aged and sick hermit, to care for him, or for a lost child, to restore it to its mother. She was a child herself, and yet there was in her a revelation of maternal love ; and with it were innocent faith, burning charity and lofty courage. She conceived and undertook this search as Joan of Arc had conceived and undertaken the deliverance of her country. It never even occurred to her that any one could ridicule or blame her resolution, and she could not understand how Amelia, guided by the

voice of blood, and at first by the hope of her love, had failed to have the same idea, or had not succeeded in carrying it out.

She walked swiftly ; no obstacle stopped her. The silence of the great woods made her neither sad nor fearful. She saw the track of wolves upon the sand, but was not afraid of meeting the hungry pack. It seemed to her that she was led by a divine hand, which made her invulnerable. Knowing Tasso by heart, from having sung his songs nightly upon the lagoons, she fancied that she was walking under the protection of her talisman, like the generous Ubaldo in search of Rinaldo amid the snares of the enchanted forest. She walked light and graceful through briers and rocks with the glow of a secret pride on her brow, and her cheeks colored with a faint flush. Never had she been more beautiful at the theatre in her heroic roles, and yet at that moment she thought no more of her surroundings than she had thought of herself when she went upon the stage.

From time to time she would pause and think. "Suppose I were to meet him suddenly," she said to herself, "what could I say to convince and quiet him? I know nothing about the profound and mysterious matters which disturb him. I see them through a veil of poetry which they have scarce lifted from before my eyes, all dazzled by such novel visions. I should need more than zeal and charity ; I should need learning and eloquence to find words worthy to be listened to by a man so much my superior, by a madman so

wise in comparison with all the reasonable beings among whom I have lived. Well, God will inspire me when the moment comes, for I should seek in vain for words, and only lose myself more and more in the darkness of my own ignorance. Ah, if I had read many religious books like Count Christian and the Canoness Wenceslawa, if I knew all the rules of devotion and the prayers of the Church, I should find one which would fit the circumstances ! But I hardly know a few sentences of the catechism, and I can only pray when I sing. However sensitive he may be to music, I shall never convince this learned theologian by a cadence or a musical phrase. Never mind ! It seems to me that there is more power in my earnest and resolute heart than in all the doctrines of his relatives, good and kind as they are, but uncertain and cold as the fog and snow of their fatherland."

CHAPTER V.

THE path which Consuelo was following wound tortuously through a rough and heavily wooded country, and at last ended upon an elevation, strewn with rocks and ruins which could hardly be told apart, so destructive, as if jealous of the hand of time, had been the hand of man. What was now but a mass of rubbish had been once a village, and had been burned by the orders of the terrible blind man, the Calixtine chief, John Ziska, from whom Albert thought that he was descended, and who may, perhaps, have really been his ancestor. One dark and stormy night, when the fierce and tireless commander had ordered his troops to assault the Castle of the Giants, then held for the emperor by the Saxons, some of his soldiers began to murmur, and one of them, who was standing near him, said, "This cursed blind man thinks that we can all do without light as well as he." At this Ziska, turning to the four faithful disciples who accompanied him everywhere, guiding his horse and chariot, and accurately describing to him the topography of the ground and the movements of the enemy, said, "Is there not a village near here?"—"Yes, father," replied the Taborite, "at your right, on a hill opposite the fortress." Then Ziska called the soldier whose grumbling had attracted his notice, and said to him,

“ My son, you complain of the darkness ; go quickly and set fire to the village which is on the hill at my right, and by the light of the flames we shall be able to march and fight.”

The terrible order was executed, and the burning village lighted the march and the assault of the Taborites. The Castle of the Giants was carried in a couple of hours, and Ziska took possession of it. The next morning at daybreak they noticed, and told him, that in the midst of the ruins of the village, and on the very top of the hill from which the soldiers had reconnoitred the castle, a young oak, the only one in the neighborhood, stood erect and verdant, preserved apparently from the heat of the flames which rose around it by the water of a cistern which bathed its roots.

“ Well do I know that cistern,” said Ziska ; “ ten of our people were thrown into it by the accursed inhabitants of the village, and since then the stone which covers it has never been raised. Let it remain there and serve them as a monument, for we are not of those who believe that wandering souls are driven from the gates of Paradise by the Romish turnkey Peter, of whom they have made a saint, because their bodies rot in ground unblessed by the priests of Belial. Let the bones of our brothers rest in peace in this cistern ; their souls live. They have already put on new bodies, and these martyrs are fighting among us, although we do not know them. As for the inhabitants of the village, they have received their due ; and

as for the oak, it has done well to scorn the fire ; a nobler destiny than to shelter miscreants was reserved for it. We need a gallows, and here it is. Go fetch me the twenty Augustine monks whom we took in their convent yesterday, and who seem unwilling to go with us ; we will hang them on the branches of this good oak, to which such ornaments will soon restore its strength."

No sooner said than done. From that day the oak was called "The Hussite" ; the stone of the cistern, "The Rock of Terror" ; and the ruins of the village, "Schreckenstein."

Consuelo had already heard all the details of this gloomy story from the Baroness Amelia. But as she had only seen the spot from a distance, except in the darkness on the night of her arrival, she would not have recognized it if she had not seen, when she cast her eyes below her into the ravine traversed by the road, the remains of the enormous oak, riven by the lightning, which no dweller in the country nor servant of the castle had dared to cut up and carry away, so great was the superstitious terror which still attached, after so many centuries, to this horrible contemporary of John Ziska.

Albert's visions and predictions had given a yet more terrible character to this tragic spot. Consequently, when Consuelo found herself alone at the Rock of Terror, on which she had sat down to recover from her fatigue, she felt her courage fail her and her heart throb strangely. Not only Albert, but

the mountaineers of the whole region, believed that frightful apparitions haunted the Schreckenstein, and no hunter was bold enough to go near it in search of game. Therefore this hill, in spite of its proximity to the castle, was often the home of wolves and other wild beasts, which found in it a safe refuge from the pursuit of the baron and his dogs. The imperturbable Frederick did not believe that there was much danger of his being assailed there by the devil, with whom, for that matter, he would rather have enjoyed a hand-to-hand struggle ; but superstitious in his own way and in the direction of his principal tastes, he thought that an evil influence threatened his dogs there, and would afflict them with an unknown and incurable disease. He had lost several from allowing them to drink in the rills which flowed from the hill, and which, perhaps, sprang from the closed cistern, the ancient tomb of the Hussites ; and so when his dogs forgot themselves in the neighborhood of the Schreckenstein, he called them promptly back to his side.

Consuelo, blushing at an attack of cowardice which she resolved to overcome, made up her mind to stay for some moments on the terrible stone, and to leave it only with the deliberation which befits an unterrified mind under such circumstances. But when she turned her eyes from the charred oak two hundred feet below her to look at the objects immediately about her, she saw that she was not alone upon the Rock of Terror, but that a strange being had just sat

down beside her, without revealing his approach by the slightest noise. The figure had a great, round, gaping head, which rolled about on a misshapen body, thin and crooked as a grasshopper's, and clad in an indiscrutable costume, which belonged to no age nor country, and which was dreadfully tattered. Still, there was nothing frightful about the creature except the suddenness of its appearance, for it gave no signs of hostility. A sweet and caressing smile played about its large mouth, and a childish expression softened the wildness which was revealed in its wandering look and abrupt gestures. When Consuelo found herself alone with a lunatic in a spot where no one assuredly could have come to her help, she was really frightened, in spite of his repeated bows and affectionate laughter. She thought it best to reply to his smiles and nods so as not to irritate him, but, all pale and trembling, she hastened to rise and go away. The idiot did not pursue her, or attempt to call her back. He only climbed upon the Rock of Terror to follow her with his eyes, and waved his cap to her as he jumped up and down, while he kept repeating a Bohemian word which she did not understand. When she got a little distance from him she recovered enough courage to look at and listen to him. She was already reproaching herself for having been afraid of one of those unfortunate beings whom she was pitying but a moment before because of the contempt and neglect with which they were treated.

"This lunatic is good-natured," she said ; "perhaps he went mad from love. He can find no refuge from

heartlessness and contempt but this dreadful rock where no one else would dare to live, and where the demons and spectres are more humane to him than his fellow-men, since they do not drive him away nor disturb his natural gayety. Poor man, laughing and playing like a little child, with your grizzled beard and crooked figure, God, no doubt, protects and blesses you in your misfortune, since He sends you none but happy thoughts, and has not made you irritable and misanthropic, as you have a right to be ! ”

The idiot, seeing that she paused, and appearing to understand her kindly look, began to speak Bohemian to her with extreme volubility, and his voice had a sweetness and charm which contrasted strangely with his ugliness. Consuelo, who could not understand him, thought that she ought to give him alms ; and drawing a piece of money from her pocket, she laid it on a large stone after holding it up to show it to him, and pointed out the place where she had placed it. But the idiot began to laugh still louder as he rubbed his hands, and said to her in broken German, —

“ Useless, useless ! Zdenko needs nothing ; Zdenko is happy, very happy ; Zdenko has consolation, consolation, consolation.”

Then, as if he had recollected a word which he had long been trying to remember, he cried out with a burst of joy, and intelligibly, although he pronounced very badly, —

“ Consuelo, Consuelo, Consuelo de mi alma ! ”

Consuelo stopped amazed, and addressing him in Spanish, said, —

“Why do you call me thus? Who taught you this name? Do you understand the language in which I am speaking?”

To all these questions he made no reply, but hopped up and down and rubbed his hands like one delighted with himself; and as long as she was within the sound of his voice she heard him repeating her name in different inflections, with laughter and exclamations of joy, as a talking bird tries to pronounce some word which has been taught it, and breaks off into the warbling of its natural voice.

On her way back to the castle, Consuelo was lost in conjectures. “Who,” she said, “can have revealed my incognito, so that the first savage I meet in this wilderness calls me by my name? Can this idiot have seen me anywhere? These people travel; perhaps he has been in Venice.” She tried in vain to recall the faces of all the beggars and vagabonds she had been accustomed to seeing on the quays and on the Place of St. Mark, but the idiot of the Rock of Terror was not among them.

But as she was going across the drawbridge, a more logical and interesting connection of ideas came into her mind. She resolved to clear up her suspicions, and congratulated herself on not having been altogether unsuccessful in the expedition which she had just made.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Consuelo found herself once more with the silent and dejected family, she, who was full of animation and hope, reproached herself for the severity with which she had judged these deeply afflicted people. Count Christian and the canoness ate almost nothing at breakfast, and the chaplain did not dare to satisfy his appetite. Amelia appeared to be in an extremely bad humor. When they rose from table, the old count paused a moment before the window, as if to look at the sandy road by which Albert might perhaps return, and shook his head sadly, as if to say, "Another day has begun badly and will end in the same way."

Consuelo attempted to divert them by playing upon the clavichord some of the recent sacred compositions of Porpora, to which they always listened with special interest and admiration. It grieved her to see them so cast down without being able to tell them that she had some hope. But when she saw the count resume his book and the canoness her needle, and when she was called by the good woman to decide whether the stitches in the centre of an ornament should be white or blue, her interest reverted to Albert, who was perhaps dying of fatigue and hunger in some corner of the woods, without knowing how to find his way home,

or lying bound by his catalepsy on some rock, at the mercy of wolves and serpents, while under the active and persevering hand of Wenceslawa, brilliant flowers seemed to bloom by thousands upon her frame, watered sometimes by a furtive tear.

As soon as Amelia's ill-humor would allow Consuelo to engage her in conversation, she asked her if there was not a misshapen idiot who wandered about the country clad in strange garments and laughing like a child at those whom he met.

"Ah, it is Zdenko!" replied Amelia. "Have you never seen him on your walks? One meets him everywhere, for he has no home."

"I saw him this morning for the first time, when he welcomed me to the Shreckenstein."

"Was that where you went at daybreak? I am beginning to believe that you are a little mad yourself, my dear Nina, to go alone so early to these lonely spots where you may meet something far worse than the harmless idiot Zdenko."

"I may meet a hungry wolf?" said Consuelo, smiling; "it seems to me that your father's rifle ought to protect the whole neighborhood."

"I do not mean wild beasts alone," said Amelia; "the country is not so safe as you think it as to the most dangerous animals in the world, brigands and vagabonds. The wars which have just ended have ruined so many families that numbers of beggars have taken to asking alms at the point of the pistol. There are also crowds of these Egyptian Zingari, whom in

France they do us the honor to call Bohemians, as if they sprang from our mountains because they have infested them ever since they appeared in Europe. These people, who have been driven out everywhere, are cowardly and obsequious before an armed man, but might be very dangerous to a handsome girl like you, and I am afraid that your fancy for adventurous excursions exposes you to greater risk than is befitting so sensible a person as my dear Porporina."

"Dear baroness," replied Consuelo, "although you seem to regard the jaws of a wolf as a trifling danger beside this other, I confess that I am much more afraid of them than of the Zingari. They are old acquaintances of mine, and besides, it is not easy for me to be afraid of creatures who are weak, poor and persecuted. It seems to me that I should always be able to say something to them which would gain their confidence and sympathy; for no matter how ugly, ill-clad or despised they may be, I cannot help taking an especial interest in them."

"Brava, my dear! I see that you have Albert's noble feelings towards beggars, outlaws and lunatics, and I should not be surprised to see you some fine morning taking a walk, leaning like him on the rather dirty and very unsteady arm of the idiot Zdenko."

These words gave Consuelo a ray of light which she had been seeking since the beginning of the conversation, and which consoled her for her companion's irritability.

"Then Count Albert is on good terms with

Zdenko?" she asked, with an expression of satisfaction, which she did not even attempt to conceal.

"He is his most intimate, his most precious friend," replied Amelia, with a smile of contempt. "He is the companion of his walks, the confidant of his secrets and his messenger, they say, in his correspondence with the devil. He and Albert alone dare to go at all hours and discourse of diabolical matters upon the Rock of Terror. Only Albert and Zdenko do not blush to sit down on the grass with the Zingari, who halt under our pine-trees, and to share with them the disgusting cookery which they prepare in their wooden bowls. They call that taking the communion, and it must be confessed that it is communicating in every kind possible. Ah, what a husband, what a desirable lover would my Cousin Albert be, when he took the hand of his betrothed in one which had just pressed that of some plague-stricken Zingaro, to raise it to that mouth which had just been drinking the communion wine from the same cup with Zdenko!"

"All this may be very entertaining," said Consuelo, "but I confess that I do not understand it in the least."

"That is because you have no taste for history, and have not listened carefully to everything that I have told you about the Hussites and the Protestants during all the days that I have talked myself hoarse explaining to you scientifically the mysterious and absurd performances of my cousin. Did I not tell you that the great quarrel of the Hussites with the

Roman Church was about the communion in both kinds? The Council of Basle declared that it was a profanation to give laymen the blood of Christ under the form of wine, asserting — observe the fine reasoning — that his body and blood were contained equally in both kinds, and that whoever ate the one drank the other. Do you understand?"

"It seems to me that the Fathers of the Council did not understand it very well themselves. They should have said, to be logical, that the communion of the wine was unnecessary. But profane? Why so, if when they ate the bread, they drank the blood also?"

"The Hussites had a terrible thirst for blood, and the Fathers anticipated them. They, too, were thirsty for the blood of this people, but they wished to drink it in the form of gold. The Roman Church has always been hungry and thirsty for that life-sap of nations, — the labor and sweat of the poor. The poor rebelled and took back their sweat and their blood from the treasures of the abbeys and the copes of the bishops. That is the whole basis of the quarrel, to which were added, as I told you, the national feeling of independence and hatred of the foreigner. The dispute concerning the communion was but a symbol. Rome and its priests communicated in jewelled golden chalices; the Hussites communicated in wooden cups, to ridicule the luxury of the Church and imitate the poverty of the apostles. That is why Albert has taken it into his head to become a Hussite, after these details

of the past have lost all their significance. Albert, who pretends that he knows the true doctrine of John Huss better than Huss himself, invents all sorts of communions, and goes about celebrating them on the highways with beggars, pagans and imbeciles. It was a mania of the Hussites to communicate everywhere, at all times and with all sorts of people."

"All this is very strange," said Consuelo, "and I can only explain it in the case of Count Albert by an overheated patriotism that almost reaches madness. The idea is profound, perhaps, but the forms which he gives it seem to me only childish for so serious and learned a man. Is not almsgiving the true communion, rather? What is the good of vain ceremonies which have gone out of fashion and are certainly not understood by those who join with him in them?"

"As for almsgiving, Albert does not fail in that; and if they left him to himself, he would soon be rid of the riches which, for my part, I should be glad to see poured into the hands of his beggars."

"Why so?"

"Because then my father would give up the idea of enriching me by making me marry this demoniac. For you must know, dear Porporina," added Amelia, with malicious significance, "that my family has by no means given up this pleasing design. During these last few days, when my cousin's reason shone like a stray sunbeam between the clouds, my father came back to the assault with more firmness than I thought

that he could show with me. We had a lively quarrel, with the apparent result that he will try to overcome my resistance by the dreariness of my life here, as they try to capture a citadel by famine. Consequently, if I succumb, I shall have to marry Albert in spite of myself, in spite of him and in spite of a third person who pretends not to care about it at all."

"Here it is at last!" replied Consuelo, laughing; "I was expecting this epigram, and you have only done me the honor to talk to me this morning that you might deliver it. I am glad of it, for I see in this little comedy of jealousy a livelier affection for Count Albert than you are willing to acknowledge."

"Nina!" cried the young baroness earnestly, "if you think you see that, you have little acuteness; and if you see it with pleasure, you can have little affection for me. I am hot-tempered and proud, perhaps, but not insincere. As I have told you, Albert's preference for you makes me angry with him, not with you. It wounds my vanity, but it encourages my hopes and wishes. It makes me desire that he may commit some extravagance for your sake which will rid me of all need of consideration for him, by giving me a reason for the aversion against which I have long struggled, but which I feel at last unmixed with pity or love."

"Heaven send," said Consuelo, gently, "that this be the utterance of passion, not of truth; for it would be a very hard truth in the mouth of a cruel person."

The anger and bitterness which Amelia displayed

during this conversation made little impression on Consuelo's generous mind. A few moments later she thought only of her enterprise ; and her dream of restoring Albert to his family lent a sort of simple pleasure to the monotony of her occupations. She needed it to counteract the ennui which threatened her, and which would have been fatal to her, so unfamiliar was it to her active and laborious nature. After she had given her self-willed and inattentive pupil a long and wearisome lesson, she had no resource but to exercise her voice and study her old composers. But even this consolation, which had never failed her, was by no means easy to obtain. Amelia, in her restless idleness, would interrupt her every few moments with childish questions and foolish remarks. The rest of the family were frightfully sad. Five weary days had passed without the return of the young count, and each day of his absence added to their grief and anxiety. During the afternoon Consuelo was walking about the garden with Amelia, when she saw Zdenko on the opposite side of the moat which separated it from the open country. He seemed to be talking to himself, and from his tone one would have fancied that he was telling a story. Consuelo stopped her companion, and begged her to translate what the strange being was saying.

“How can you expect me to translate disconnected and meaningless ramblings?” said Amelia, shrugging her shoulders ; “this is what he has just said, if you insist on knowing, —

“ ‘There was once a great mountain all white, all white, and beside it was a great mountain all black, all black ; and there was another mountain all red, all red.’

“ Does that interest you much ? ”

“ Perhaps, if I could know the rest. Oh, what would I not give to understand Bohemian ! I must learn it.”

“ It is not quite so easy as Italian or Spanish ; but you are so studious that you could succeed if you chose. I will teach it to you, if it will give you pleasure.”

“ You would be an angel ! But it must be on condition that you are more patient as a teacher than as a scholar. Now what is Zdenko saying ? ”

“ The mountains are talking now.

“ ‘Red mountain, red mountain, why have you crushed the black, black mountain ? White mountain, white mountain, why have you let them crush the black, black mountain ? ’ ”

Then Zdenko began to sing in a thin and broken voice, but so true and so sweetly that it touched Consuelo's heart. The song said, —

“ Black mountain and white mountain, you will need a great deal of water from the red mountain to wash your robes.

“ Your robes black with crimes and white with idleness, your robes soiled with lies and crimsoned with pride.

“ Now they are both washed, well washed, those

robes which would not change their color ; they are worn, well worn, those robes which would not drag upon the ground.

“ Now the mountains are red, all red ! It will need all the water in the sky, — all the water in the sky to wash them clean.”

“ Is it an improvisation or an old folk-song ? ” asked Consuelo.

“ Who can tell ? ” replied Amelia ; “ Zdenko is an inexhaustible improviser or a learned rhapsodist. Our peasants love passionately to listen to him, and respect him as a saint, considering his madness a gift of Heaven rather than a disgrace of nature. They feed and pet him, and it is his own fault that he is not the best lodged and best clad man in the neighborhood, for they all struggle for the pleasure and advantage of having him for a guest. He is thought to bring good luck. When the weather is threatening, if Zdenko happens to pass, they say, “ It will be nothing ; the hail will not fall here.” If the crops are bad, they ask Zdenko to sing, and as he always promises them abundance and fertility, they console themselves for the present by hoping for the future. But Zdenko will not live anywhere ; his vagabond character draws him to the forest. No one knows where he shelters himself at night, or where he finds a refuge from the cold and the storm. Never during the last ten years has he been seen beneath any roof save that of the Castle of the Giants, because he pretends that his ancestors are in all the houses in the neighborhood

and that he is forbidden to appear before them. Yet he follows Albert even to his room, because he is as devoted and obedient to him as his dog Cynabre. Albert is the only mortal who can enchain his wild independence, and can with a word put an end to his inexhaustible gayety, his eternal songs and his tireless babble. They say that Zdenko had a very beautiful voice, but that he has worn it out in talking, singing and laughing. He is hardly older than Albert, although he appears like a man of fifty. They were companions in childhood. At that time, Zdenko was only half crazy. Descended from an ancient family (one of his ancestors figured with some distinction in the Hussite War), he showed enough memory and intelligence for his parents, in consideration of his physical weakness, to destine him for the cloister. For a long while he wore the dress of a novice of one of the mendicant orders, but they never could make him obedient to the monastic regulations, and when they would send him on a trip with one of the brothers of his convent and an ass loaded with the contributions of the faithful, he would abandon sack, ass and brother and go for a long holiday in the depths of the forest. When Albert went on his travels, Zdenko fell into a sombre melancholy, threw his gown to the dogs and became a vagabond altogether. His sadness vanished by degrees, but the sort of reason which had always shone amid all his oddities went out entirely. Now he says nothing but incoherent things, displays all sorts of incomprehensible manias, and has become really mad.

But as he is always sober, chaste and inoffensive, he may be considered an idiot rather than a madman. Our peasants call him the 'innocent,' and nothing more."

"All that you tell me of this poor man interests me," said Consuelo; "I should like to speak to him. He speaks a little German?"

"He understands it and can speak it after a fashion, but like all Bohemian peasants he hates the language; besides, when he is plunged in a reverie, as he is now, it is very doubtful if he will answer you."

"Speak to him in his own language, at any rate, and try to attract his attention," said Consuelo.

Amelia called to Zdenko several times, asking him in Bohemian if he were well and if he wished anything; but she could never make him raise his head, or break off a game which he was playing with three pebbles, — one white, one black and one red, — which he threw at each other, laughing delightedly whenever he knocked them over.

"You see that it is useless," said Amelia; "when he is not hungry or is not seeking for Albert he never speaks to us. In either of these cases, he comes to the gate of the castle, and if he is only hungry he remains there. They give him what he desires and he thanks them and goes away. If he wishes to see Albert, he enters, goes and knocks at the door of his room, which is never closed against him, and he remains there for hours, silent and quiet as a timid child if Albert is working, bright and gay if Albert is inclined

to listen to him ; but never annoying to my amiable cousin, it seems, and more happy in this respect than any member of his family."

"And when Count Albert disappears, as he has done now, for instance, does Zdenko remain quiet and show no anxiety, he who loved him so ardently and lost his gayety when the count went on his travels?"

"He is not concerned in the least. He says that Albert has gone to see God. It is what he said when Albert was travelling and Zdenko had accepted the situation."

"And you have no suspicion, dear Amelia, that Zdenko may have better reason for his unconcern than any of you? Has it never occurred to you that he knew Albert's secret, and watched over him in his madness or his lethargy?"

"It has often occurred to us, and for a long time they kept a watch on him ; but like his master Albert he detests watching and has baffled all our efforts with the wiliness of a fox pursued by hounds. It seems, too, that he has, like Albert, the gift of making himself invisible whenever he pleases. He has sometimes disappeared instantly while under the gaze of people, as if he had cloven the earth to hide beneath it, or as if a cloud had wrapped him in its impenetrable mantle. That at least is what our people say, and even my Aunt Wenceslawa herself, whose head, in spite of her piety, is not very strong in regard to the powers of the devil."

“But you, dear baroness, cannot believe in all these absurdities.”

“I agree with my Uncle Christian. He thinks that if Albert has no help or support in his mysterious distress except this idiot, it would be very dangerous to take it from him, and that by watching Zdenko they risk depriving Albert for hours or days of the aid and even of the food which he may obtain from his humble friend. But for Heaven’s sake, dear Nina, let us change the subject ; we have certainly had enough of it, and this idiot does not interest me as he does you. I am heartily tired of his stories and his songs, and his cracked voice gives me a sore throat.”

“I am astonished,” said Consuelo, allowing her companion to draw her away, “that this voice has not an extraordinary charm for you. All worn as it is, it impresses me more than those of the greatest singers.”

“That is because you are satiated with beautiful things, and novelty amuses you.”

“The tongue in which he sings is singularly sweet,” said Consuelo, “and the monotony of his melodies is not what you think. The ideas are, on the contrary, very flowing and original.”

“Not to me,” replied Amelia ; “I am sick of them. At first I took some interest in the words, thinking, like the country people, that they were old national songs, and very curious from an historical standpoint ; but as he never repeats them twice alike I became convinced that they were improvisations, and soon concluded that it was not worth the trouble to listen

to them, although our mountaineers think they find a symbolic meaning in them."

As soon as Consuelo could get rid of Amelia she hurried to the garden and found Zdenko in the same place, on the opposite side of the moat, playing at the same game. Convinced that this unfortunate creature had secret relations with Albert, she had slipped into the pantry and carried off a cake made of flour and honey, carefully prepared by the hands of the canoness herself. Consuelo recollected having noticed that Albert, who ate very little, had shown a mechanical preference for this dish, which his aunt always made for him with the greatest care. She wrapped it up in a handkerchief, and wishing to throw it to Zdenko across the moat, ventured to call him. But as he did not seem willing to listen to her, she recollected the interest with which he had spoken her name, and pronounced it at first in German. Zdenko seemed to hear it, but he was melancholy at the moment, and repeated in German, without looking at her, as he shook his head and sighed, "Consolation, consolation!" as if to say, "I no longer hope for consolation."

"Consuelo!" she cried, to see if her Spanish name would revive the joy he had shown in the morning when he spoke it.

Zdenko immediately abandoned his pebbles and began to leap and gambol upon the edge of the moat, throwing his cap above his head and stretching out his arms to her, speaking with great animation in Bohemian, and with his face radiant with happiness and

affection. "Albert!" cried Consuelo again, as she threw him the cake.

Zdenko laughed as he picked it up, and did not unfold the handkerchief; but he said many things to her in Bohemian, which she was in despair at being unable to understand. She noticed especially, and endeavored to recollect, a phrase which he repeated several times as he bowed to her. Her musical ear enabled her to catch the exact pronunciation of it, and as soon as she had lost sight of Zdenko, who was hurrying away at the top of his speed, she wrote it down in Venetian spelling, intending to ask Amelia the meaning of it. But before leaving Zdenko she wished to give him something which would show Albert in a more delicate way the interest which she felt in him, and having called back the idiot, who came obedient to her voice, she threw him a bunch of flowers which she had gathered in the hot-house an hour before, and which were still fresh and fragrant. Zdenko picked it up, repeated his bow, his exclamation and his gambols, and disappeared in the thick underbrush, where it seemed as if nothing larger than a hare could make its way. Consuelo followed his path for some distance by watching the shaking of the tops of the bushes, but a breeze which shook them all alike made this impossible, and Consuelo went back to the house more determined than ever on carrying out her design.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Amelia was called to translate the phrase which Consuelo had written on her tablets and graven on her memory, she said that she did not understand it at all, but that it might be translated literally by these words : —

“May he who has been wronged salute you.”

“Perhaps,” she added, “he means Albert or himself, saying that we wrong them by calling them mad, for they consider themselves the only reasonable beings in the world. But what is the use in trying to understand the talk of a madman? Zdenko occupies your thoughts far more than he deserves.”

“The common people in every country,” replied Consuelo, “believe that madmen have an inspiration which is denied to cold and positive minds. I have a right to preserve the prejudices of my class, and I shall never believe that a madman is speaking at random when he says things which appear to us unintelligible.”

“Let us see whether the chaplain, who is very learned in all the expressions employed by our country people, knows this one,” said Amelia, going to the good man and repeating Zdenko’s phrase to him. The mysterious words seemed to horrify the priest.

“Good heavens !” he cried, turning pale, “where did your ladyship hear such a blasphemy?”

"If it is one, I cannot see it," replied Amelia, laughing, "and that is why I am waiting for your translation."

"Word for word, in German, it is what you have just said, madame ; that is, 'May he who has been wronged salute you' ; but if you wish to know its meaning, it is, in the mind of the idolater who speaks it, 'May the devil be with you !' "

"In other words," said Amelia, laughing still louder, "'go to the devil' ! Well, it is a pretty compliment, and that is your reward for conversing with idiots, my dear Nina. You little thought that Zdenko, with his affable smile and playful manner, was making you such ungallant remarks."

"Zdenko !" cried the chaplain ; "ah, it is this wretched idiot who said it ! I am glad of that. I was afraid that it might have been some one else, and I was wrong, for such an expression could only come from a head stuffed with the abominations of the ancient heresy ! Where can he learn things which are almost unknown and forgotten at this day ? The evil spirit alone could teach them to him."

"But it is only a common oath which is employed in every language," replied Amelia, "and Catholics use it as much as any one else."

"You are quite wrong, baroness," said the chaplain. "This is no oath to the mind of the lost being who makes use of it, but an homage and a benediction, on the contrary, and therein lies the wickedness. This abomination comes from the Lollards, a detestable

sect which produced the Waldenses, which produced the Hussites " —

"Which produced many others," said Amelia, assuming a grave expression, in ridicule of the good priest. "But come, chaplain, explain to us how it can be a compliment to commend any one to the devil."

"In the belief of the Lollards, Satan was not the enemy of the human race, but their protector and friend. They considered him a victim of injustice and jealousy. According to them, the archangel Michael and the other heavenly powers who had cast him into the pit were the real demons, while Lucifer, Beelzebub, Ashtaroth, Astarte and all the monsters of hell were innocence and light itself. They believed that the reign of Michael and his glorious legions would shortly end, and that the devil would be rehabilitated and reascend to heaven with his accursed horde. They paid him an unholy worship, and accosted each other with the expression, 'May he who has been wronged' — that is, he who has been unjustly condemned — 'salute you,' that is, protect and aid you."

"Well," said Amelia, laughing loudly, "now my dear Nina is under a powerful protection, and I should not be surprised if it soon became necessary to employ exorcisms to destroy the effect of Zdenko's incantations."

Consuelo cared little for this jesting. She was not very sure that the devil was a chimera, after all, and

hell a poetical myth. She would have been inclined to regard the chaplain's fright seriously, if he had not appeared wholly ridiculous just then, scandalized as he was by Amelia's laughter. Puzzled and disturbed in all her childish beliefs by this struggle, in which she felt herself involved, between the superstition of the one side and the incredulity of the other, Consuelo had great difficulty in saying her prayers that evening. She examined the meaning of all those devotional formulas which she had previously employed mechanically, and which no longer satisfied her anxious mind. "From what I could see," she thought, "there were two sorts of devotion in Venice. That of the monks, nuns and the common people goes too far, perhaps; for it accepts, along with the mysteries of religion, all sorts of superstitious accessories, — the Orco (the devil of the lagoons), Malamocco's sorceries, the gold-seekers, the horoscope, and vows to the saints for the success of designs which are far from pious, and sometimes far from honest. The devotion of the higher clergy and society is only a mockery. They go to church, as to a theatre, to hear the music and to show themselves; they laugh at everything and believe nothing in religion, thinking that there is nothing serious in it, nor anything to bind the conscience, and that it is all a matter of form and custom. Anzoletto was not in the least religious; it was one of my sorrows, and I was right to be frightened at his unbelief. My master, Porpora, what did he believe? I do not know; he never told me. Yet he spoke to

me of God and heavenly things in the most painful and solemn moment of my life. But although his words impressed me strongly, they left me terrified and uncertain. He seemed to believe in a jealous and absolute God, who sent genius and inspiration only to beings set apart by their pride from the sorrows and joys of their fellow-men. My heart revolts against this cruel faith, and refuses to love a God who forbids me to love on earth. What is the true God, then? Who will teach me? My poor mother believed; but how many childish idolatries were mingled with her worship! What can I believe or think? Shall I say, like the thoughtless Amelia, that Reason is the only God? But she does not know even that God, and cannot teach me of it; for there could not be a less reasonable creature than she. Can one live without religion? What is the use of living, then? For what end should I labor? Why should I, who am alone in the world, have pity, courage, generosity, conscience and uprightness if there is not in the universe a Supreme Being, intelligent and full of love, who will judge, approve, help, preserve and protect me? What strength, what happiness, can they find in life who can dispense with a hope and love which is above all human illusions and vicissitudes?

"Supreme Master," she cried in her heart, forgetting the formulas of her wonted prayers, "teach me what to do! Supreme Love, teach me what to love! Supreme Wisdom, teach me what to believe!"

Thus praying and meditating, she forgot the flight of time, and it was after midnight when, before retiring, she cast a glance over the moonlit landscape. The view from her window was not extensive, on account of the mountains which shut it in, but it was extremely picturesque. A torrent ran at the bottom of a narrow and winding valley between gently swelling fields lying at the base of the irregular hills which opened here and there to allow a glimpse of other mountains and gorges behind them still steeper, and crowned with black firs. The light of the setting moon threw into relief the most striking features of this rough and dreary landscape, where even the bright green of the fields, the foaming torrent and the great rocks, crowned with moss and lichens, all were equally sombre.

As Consuelo was comparing this scene with others through which she had passed in her childhood, she was struck by an idea which had not before come to her, — that this view which she had before her eyes was not strange to her, either because she had formerly passed through this part of Bohemia, or because she had seen elsewhere something extremely like it. “My mother and I travelled so much that it would not be strange if we had been here. I recollect Dresden and Vienna very distinctly. We may easily have gone through Bohemia from one of these capitals to the other. Yet it would be strange if we had received hospitality in some farmhouse belonging to this castle where I am now a person of importance,

or if we had earned by our singing a piece of bread at one of these huts where Zdenko now holds out his hand as he sings his old songs, — Zdenko, the wandering singer, who is my equal and my fellow, although it is no longer apparent.”

Just then she looked toward the Schreckenstein, which could be seen across an intermediate hill, and it seemed to her that this mysterious place was crowned with a reddish light which faintly tinted the transparent blue of the sky. She looked attentively and was this light increase, diminish and increase again, until at last it became so clear and intense that she could not attribute it to an illusion of her senses. Whether it was the momentary resting-place of a band of Zingari or the bivouac of some brigand, it was evident that the Schreckenstein was then occupied by living beings ; for after her innocent and fervent prayer to the God of truth, Consuelo was not inclined to believe in the fantastic and malicious beings with whom popular tradition peopled the mountain. But had not Zdenko lit the fire to protect himself against the cold of the night ? And if it was Zdenko, might it not be to warm Albert that the dry boughs of the forest were burning ? This light on the Schreckenstein had often been seen ; it was spoken of with dread and attributed to supernatural causes. It had been said that it came from the enchanted trunk of Ziska’s oak ; but the Hussite no longer existed, or at any rate it lay at the bottom of a ravine, and the red light came from the top of the hill. How was it that

this mysterious watch-fire had never called attention to Albert's possible retreat?

"Oh, apathy of devout souls!" thought Consuelo, "are you a blessing of Providence or an infirmity of nature?" She asked herself at the same time whether she would have courage to go alone at that hour to the Schreckenstein, and she answered that, led by charity, she certainly would. But she could take but small credit to herself for her bravery, as the strict closing of the castle left her no possibility of carrying out such a design.

The next morning she awoke full of zeal and hurried to the Schreckenstein. There all was silent and lonely. The grass did not appear trodden about the Rock of Terror. There was no trace of fire nor any vestige of the presence of the nocturnal visitors.

She went over the mountain in every direction, and found no sign of them. She called Zdenko on all sides, and tried to whistle to see if she could arouse Cynabre's barking. She repeatedly called her own name, and shouted "Consolation" in all the languages she knew. She sang some phrases of her Spanish hymn and even of Zdenko's Bohemian air, which she remembered perfectly. Nothing replied to her. The crackling of the dried lichens under her feet and the murmurs of the mysterious waters which flowed beneath the rocks were the only noises which answered her.

Wearied by her useless exploration, she was about to return after a moment's rest upon the rock, when

she saw at her feet a crumpled and faded rose-leaf. She picked it up, unfolded it, and made sure that it could only have come from the bouquet which she had thrown to Zdenko, since the mountain bore no wild roses, nor was it the season for them. There were none yet but in the castle hot-house. This faint sign consoled her for the apparent uselessness of her walk, and left her more persuaded than ever that she must expect to find Albert at the Schreckenstein.

But in what cavern of this impenetrable mountain could he be hidden? He could not be there all the time, or else he must be at that moment in one of his attacks of cataleptic lethargy. Or had she been mistaken in thinking that her voice had any power over him, and was the excitement which he had shown only a fit of madness, which had left no trace in his memory? Perhaps he saw and heard her now, and was laughing at her efforts and despising her useless advances.

At this last idea, Consuelo felt a burning flush rise to her cheeks, and she hurriedly left the Schreckenstein, almost vowing that she would never return there. Nevertheless, she left upon the rock a little basket of fruit which she had brought with her.

But the next day she found the basket in the same place; no one had touched it. The leaves which covered the fruit had not even been displaced from curiosity. Her offering had been despised, or else neither Albert nor Zdenko had passed that way; yet a red light had burned all that night on the summit of the hill.

Consuelo had remained awake till dawn to watch this phenomenon. She had seen the fire sink down and revive several times, as if kept up by some careful hand. No Zingari had been seen in the neighborhood. No stranger had been observed on the mountain-paths, and all the peasants whom Consuelo questioned concerning the light had replied in bad German that it was not well to examine these matters, and that it would not do to interfere in the affairs of the other world.

Still, nine days had passed since Albert's disappearance. It was the longest absence of this sort that he had ever made, and this delay, combined with the mysterious prophecies which had ushered in his thirtieth year, was not calculated to make the family hopeful. They began at last to be terribly disturbed. Count Christian was always sighing lamentably, the baron went hunting without attempting to kill anything, the chaplain made extraordinary prayers, Amelia no longer dared to laugh or chat, and the canoness, pale and enfeebled, careless of her domestic duties and forgetful of her tapestry, told her beads from morning till night, kept little candles burning before the image of the Virgin and seemed more bent, even, than usual.

Consuelo ventured to propose a thorough search of the Schreckenstein, confessed her own investigations, and confided to the canoness the circumstances of the rose-leaf and the pains which she had taken to watch the summit of the hill throughout the night.

But the measures which Wenceslawa wished to take quickly caused Consuelo to repent of her frankness. The canoness proposed that they should seize Zdenko and frighten him by threats, and should arm fifty men with guns and torches, so that while the chaplain was pronouncing in the middle of the night his most terrible exorcisms over the rock, the baron, with Hans and the bravest of the servants, should make a regular siege of the Schreckenstein. The best possible means of driving Albert into the most extreme madness would be to favor him with a surprise of this sort, and Consuelo, by dint of prayers and remonstrances, induced Wenceslawa to promise not to do anything without consulting her. Her own plan was to leave the castle the next night and to go alone with the canoness, followed only by Hans and the chaplain, to investigate the fire on the Schreckenstein. But this undertaking was beyond the canoness's strength. She was convinced that the witches held a Sabbath on the Rock of Terror, and all that Consuelo could obtain was that they should open the gates at midnight, and that the baron and some other willing persons should follow her, unarmed and in the utmost silence. It was agreed that this project should be concealed from Count Christian, for although his advanced age and enfeebled health forbade his going on such an excursion in the cold and unwholesome night air, he would still insist on taking part in the enterprise if he knew of it.

Everything was done as Consuelo wished. The

baron, the chaplain and Hans accompanied her. She advanced alone a hundred paces ahead of her escort, and went up on the Schreckenstein with courage worthy of Bradamante. But as she approached, the light, which appeared to proceed from fissures in the rock on the top of the hill, went out little by little, and when she reached the mysterious spot, profound darkness wrapped the mountain from its summit to its base. Silence and loneliness reigned on every side. She called Zdenko, Cynabre and even Albert. All was silent, and echo alone sent back to her the sound of her trembling voice.

She returned discouraged to her guides. They praised her courage, venturing, after her, to explore once more the spot which she had just left, but without success, and they all returned silently to the castle, where the canoness, who was waiting for them on the threshold, saw her last hope vanish before their story.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE good Wenceslawa kissed Consuelo and thanked her, and the young girl went quietly up to her room, taking care not to disturb Amelia, who had not been informed of the projected investigation. Her apartment was on the second story, while that of the canoness was on the ground-floor. But as she went upstairs she dropped her candle, which went out before she could pick it up. She thought that she could find her way without it, especially as day was beginning to break; but whether she was strangely pre-occupied, or whether her courage suddenly abandoned her, after an effort too severe for womanhood, she became so perplexed when she reached the story on which she lived that she did not stop there, but continued on to the floor above, and turned into the passage leading to Albert's room, which was almost directly above her own. But she stopped, frozen with fright, at the entrance to this passage, when she saw a slender black shadow appear before her, glide along as if its feet did not touch the floor, and enter the room towards which she was going, thinking it was her own. In spite of her fear, she had enough presence of mind to examine this figure, and to see in the dim twilight that it had the form and costume of Zdenko. But what could he be doing in Consuelo's room at

such an hour, and what message for her could he bear? She did not feel disposed to venture on an interview with him, and went down again to fetch the canoness. It was only when she had descended a flight that she recognized her own passage and the door of her room, and perceived that it was Albert's which she had just seen Zdenko enter.

Then a thousand conjectures presented themselves to her mind, which had become calm and clear once more. How could the idiot make his way at night into a castle which was so carefully closed and so thoroughly examined every evening by the canoness and the servants? Zdenko's appearance strengthened her in the idea that the castle had some secret outlet, and perhaps an underground communication with the Schreckenstein. She hastened to knock at the door of the canoness, who was already locked in her room, and who uttered a cry of surprise at seeing her without a light and somewhat pale.

"Do not be frightened, dear madam," said the young girl, "something strange has happened, but it is not very dreadful. I have just seen Zdenko going into Count Albert's room."

"Zdenko! You are dreaming, dear child! How could he get in? I locked all the doors as carefully as usual, and during your trip to the Schreckenstein I kept a careful watch. The drawbridge was raised, and after you passed over it on your return, I stopped behind to see it lifted again."

"However that may be, madam, Zdenko, is in Count

Albert's room, and you have only to go there to convince yourself of it."

"I will go at once," replied the canoness, "and drive him away, as he deserves. The wretched creature must have come in during the day. But what can bring him here? No doubt he is seeking Albert, or has come to wait for him, and that is a proof, my poor child, that he no more knows where he is than we do."

"Well, let us go and question him, at any rate," replied Consuelo.

"One moment, one moment!" said the canoness, who, as she was about to retire, had taken off two of her skirts and thought that she was too lightly clad with only three; "I cannot appear before a man in this dress. Go and bring the chaplain or the baron, whichever you meet first. We cannot risk ourselves alone with this madman,—but wait! A young person like you cannot go to the rooms of these gentlemen. I will hurry as much as I can; I shall be ready in a moment."

She began to dress again, but the more she hurried the slower she was; for being disturbed in her regular habits for the first time in years, she entirely lost her head. Consuelo, impatient at a delay which might afford Zdenko a chance to leave Albert's room and conceal himself in the castle so that they could never find him, recovered all her energy.

"Dear madam," said she, lighting her candle, "if you will call these gentlemen, I will see that Zdenko does not escape."

She went quickly up the two flights and boldly opened Albert's door, which was not fastened ; but she found the room empty. She went into an adjoining chamber, lifted all the curtains and even ventured to look under the bed and behind the furniture. Zdenko was no longer there, and had left no trace of his visit.

"There is no one here," she said to the canoness, who clattered in, followed by the chaplain and Hans. The baron was already asleep, and it had been impossible to wake him.

"I am beginning to fear," said the chaplain, a little put out at the fresh alarm which they had just given him, "that Signora Porporina may be the victim of her own illusions."

"No, chaplain," replied Consuelo, quickly ; "no one here has less of them than I."

"And no one is stronger or more devoted, that is true," said the good man ; "but in your ardent hope you think, signora, you see indications where, unfortunately, there are none."

"My father," said the canoness, "Porporina is brave as a lion and wise as a philosopher. If she saw Zdenko, Zdenko has been here ; we must seek him through the whole house, and, as it is safely locked up, thank Heaven, he cannot escape us !"

They awoke the other servants, and sought everywhere. There was not a closet but was opened, and not a piece of furniture but was moved. They even searched the hay in the immense lofts. Hans was

simple enough to look even in the baron's large boots ; but Zdenko was no more there than anywhere else. They began to believe that Consuelo had been dreaming ; but she herself was more convinced than ever that it was necessary to find the secret outlet from the castle, and she determined to bring to the task all her perseverance and strength of will. After only a few hours of rest she began her investigations. The building in which she lived, and which also contained Albert's apartment, stood with its back against the hill. Albert had chosen his room himself in this picturesque situation, which allowed him to enjoy a fine view towards the south, while on the east, on a level with his study, was a pretty little terrace. He was fond of flowers, and cultivated some rather rare ones on this plot of earth, brought from below to the barren summit of the hill. The terrace was surrounded by a wall, and from it one could see part of the vast serrated horizon of the Boehmerwald. Consuelo, who had never been in this spot before, admired its fine and picturesque situation, and then she asked the chaplain to tell her for what this terrace had been used before the castle was transformed from a fortress into a residence.

"It was," he said, "an ancient bastion, a sort of fortified terrace, from which the garrison could watch the movements of troops in the valley and on the sides of the surrounding hills. There is no defile affording a passage which cannot be seen from here. Formerly, a high wall, crenelated on all sides, surrounded this

platform, and protected its occupants from the arrows or balls of the enemy."

"And what is this?" asked Consuelo, approaching a cistern which stood in the middle of the terrace, and into which there led a steep, winding stairway.

"It is a cistern which has always furnished an abundance of excellent spring water to the besieged, an invaluable resource for a fortified place."

"Is it good to drink?" said Consuelo, examining the greenish and turbid water of the cistern. "It seems very muddy."

"It is not good now, or at least it is not always good, and Count Albert only uses it to water his flowers. I must tell you that for the last two years there has been a strange phenomenon connected with this fountain. The spring (for it is one), whose source is somewhere in the heart of the mountain, has become intermittent. For weeks at a time the surface will sink, and Count Albert has water brought by Zdenko from the well in the courtyard for his dear flowers. Then suddenly, in the course of a night or even an hour, the cistern becomes filled with warm, muddy water, such as you see. Sometimes it becomes empty rapidly; sometimes the water remains for a considerable time, and becomes clear little by little until it is cold and limpid as crystal. Something of this sort must have occurred last night, for only yesterday I saw the water clear and the cistern quite full, while now it is muddy as if it had been emptied and filled again."

"Does this phenomenon recur at regular intervals?"

"Not at all; and I should have investigated it carefully if Count Albert, who dislikes to have any one in his room or on his terrace, had not forbidden me this amusement. I have thought, and still think, that the bottom of the cistern is filled with moss and aquatic plants, which at times prevent the subterranean water from flowing in, but ultimately yield to the pressure."

"But how do you account for the sudden disappearance of the water at other times?"

"By the great quantity which the count uses in watering his flowers."

"It seems to me that it would take a great deal of labor to empty this cistern. If that is true, it cannot be deep."

"Not deep? It is impossible to find the bottom."

"In that case, your explanation is not satisfactory," said Consuelo, struck by the chaplain's stupidity.

"Find a better one yourself," said the chaplain, somewhat embarrassed and annoyed at his lack of sagacity.

"Certainly I shall find a better," thought Consuelo, deeply interested by the fountain's eccentricities.

"If you ask Count Albert what it means," said the chaplain, who wished to appear clever to the clear-sighted stranger, "he will tell you that they are his mother's tears, which are dried and flow again in the heart of the mountain. Your friend Zdenko, whom you credit with so much intelligence, would swear to

you that there is a siren in it, who sings very delightfully for those who have ears to hear her. The two of them have christened the cistern the Fountain of Tears. It may be very poetic, and those who believe in pagan fables may be satisfied with it."

"I shall not be satisfied with it," thought Consuelo, "and I shall learn how these tears are dried."

"As for me," continued the chaplain, "I have sometimes thought that there was an outlet in some part of the cistern."

"It seems to me," said Consuelo, "that without some outlet the cistern, which is supplied by a spring, would be continually overflowing."

"Certainly, certainly," said the chaplain, who did not wish to have it appear that he never thought of this before; "that is not a difficult matter to discover. But there must be a great disturbance in the natural courses of the water, since it does not maintain the the same height at all times."

"Are they natural watercourses, or aqueducts made by the hand of man?" asked the persistent Consuelo; "that is the important thing to know."

"That is what no one can know certainly," said the chaplain, "since Count Albert does not wish any one to touch his dear fountain, and has positively forbidden its being cleansed."

"I was sure of it!" said Consuelo, as she walked away; "and I think they will do well to follow his wishes, for God knows what misfortune might happen to him if they meddled with his siren."

"I am very nearly certain," said the chaplain to himself, as he left Consuelo, "that this young person's intellect is almost as unsettled as the count's. Is insanity contagious, or has Porpora sent her to us that the country air may cool off her brain? From the obstinacy with which she insisted on my explaining the mysteries of this cistern, I would have wagered that she was the daughter of some Venetian canal-builder, and that she wished to appear to understand the business; but I see from her last words, as well as from her hallucination concerning Zdenko this morning and the fool's errand which she led us to the Schreckenstein, that it is an illusion like the others. I suppose she expects to find Count Albert at the bottom of this well. Poor young people! May you recover your reason and your knowledge of the truth!"

With this, the good chaplain went to say his breviary till dinner should be ready.

"Idleness and indifference," thought Consuelo, for her part, "must engender a strange stupidity, for this holy man, who has read and learned so much, to have no suspicion of what this fountain suggests to me. The good chaplain makes little use of his reason, surely. And they call Zdenko an imbecile!"

Thereupon Consuelo went to give the young baroness a singing lesson, and to wait for the time when she might resume her investigations.

CHAPTER IX.

"HAVE you ever been present when the water went out and came back again?" said Consuelo in an undertone to the chaplain that evening, as he was quietly digesting his supper.

"Eh? What is it?" cried he, starting back on his chair and looking at her with astonishment.

"I am speaking of the cistern," replied Consuelo, composedly; "have you ever seen this phenomenon yourself?"

"Ah, yes, the cistern! I understand," he said, with a smile of pity. "There is her madness coming back," he thought.

"But answer me, please, good chaplain," said Consuelo, following out her idea with the earnestness which marked all her mental processes, and quite free from any idea of ridiculing the worthy man.

"I must confess, signora," said he very coldly, "that I have never been in a position to investigate what you are asking me about, and that I have never been sufficiently disturbed by it to lose my sleep."

"Oh, I am quite sure of that!" replied Consuelo impatiently.

The chaplain shrugged his shoulders and rose wearily from his seat to escape this persistent cross-questioning.

“Well,” thought Consuelo, “since no one here is willing to lose an hour of sleep for such an important discovery, I will devote my whole night to it, if necessary.”

While waiting for the hour of retiring, she wrapped herself in her mantle and went for a walk in the garden. The night was cold and brilliant, and the mist had disappeared as the full moon had arisen in the sky. The stars paled before it; the air was dry and still. Consuelo, who was excited rather than worn out by fatigue, sleeplessness and a generous, but perhaps unwholesome, anxiety, felt a touch of fever which the coolness of the evening could not dissipate. It seemed to her that the end of her enterprise was near. A romantic presentiment, which she took for an order and encouragement from Heaven, kept her active and agitated. She sat down on a bank of turf, and began to listen to the soft and plaintive noise of the torrent which ran through the valley. But it seemed to her that a softer and more plaintive voice mingled with the murmur and fell upon her ear. She lay down upon the turf, that, being near the ground, she might the better hear the faint sounds which the breeze almost overpowered. At last she recognized Zdenko's voice. He was singing in German, and she caught the following words, awkwardly arranged to a Bohemian air which bore the same simple and melancholy character as the one which she had already heard : —

“Below, far below, there is a suffering and travail-
ing soul which awaits its deliverance.

"Its deliverance and consolation, long promised.

"The deliverance is enchained, the consolation is pitiless.

"Below, far below, there is a suffering and travailing soul which is weary with waiting."

When the voice had ceased to sing, Consuelo arose and looked about her for Zdenko. She went through the park and the garden to find him, called him several times and at last went in again without seeing him.

An hour later, when they had recited together a long prayer for Count Albert, in which all the servants were invited to join, and when every one had retired, Consuelo went out upon the terrace and took her place beside the Fountain of Tears, and sitting down by its margin among the thick iris bushes which Albert had planted there, fixed her gaze upon the motionless surface where the moon, then at the zenith, was reflected as in a mirror.

After waiting an hour, and as the brave child, overcome by fatigue, found her eyelids growing heavy, she was aroused by a slight noise at the surface of the water. She opened her eyes, and saw the image of the moon tremble, break and stretch away in luminous circles upon the mirroring fountain. At the same time she perceived a slight boiling, accompanied by a dull sound which was almost imperceptible at first, but soon became powerful. She saw the water sink swirling, as if in a funnel, and in less than a quarter of an hour disappear in the depths of the abyss.

She ventured to go down a few steps. The staircase, which seemed to have been made to afford access to the variable surface of the water, was formed of blocks of granite inserted spirally in the rock. These slimy and slippery steps offered no support to the hand, and disappeared in a frightful depth. The darkness, the sound of the water, which still plashed at the bottom of an immeasurable precipice, and the impossibility of obtaining a secure foothold upon the treacherous ooze arrested Consuelo in her mad design. She went up backwards with great difficulty, and sat down, terrified and trembling, upon the first step.

However, the water appeared to be still retiring into the bowels of the earth. The noise became more and more indistinct, and finally ceased entirely. Consuelo thought of going for a light, to examine the interior of the cistern as far as it could be done from the top, but she was afraid of missing the arrival of him for whom she was waiting, and she patiently remained motionless for nearly an hour more. At last she thought she saw a faint gleam at the bottom of the well, and leaning anxiously forward she saw the trembling light ascending little by little. Soon she was no longer in doubt. Zdenko was mounting the spiral stair, holding by an iron chain fastened to the rock. The noise made by his grasping this chain and letting it fall again from time to time revealed to Consuelo the existence of this sort of hand-rail, which ended some distance below the top, so that she had been unable to see it. Zdenko carried a lantern,

which he hung upon a hook placed for the purpose about twenty feet below the surface, and then came lightly and rapidly up the rest of the stair, which was without the chain or any apparent points of support. Nevertheless, Consuelo, who was watching with the utmost attention, saw that he helped himself by certain projections of the rock and tufts of aquatic plants and perhaps by some bent spikes fastened in the wall, with which his hand was familiar. As soon as he was near enough to see Consuelo she hid herself behind the semicircular balustrade which surrounded the top of the well and which was broken only at the head of the stair. Zdenko came out and began to pick a large bouquet on the terrace, carefully selecting certain flowers. Then he went into Albert's study, and through the glass door Consuelo could see him looking through the books, searching for one which at last he seemed to find, for he came back to the cistern laughing and talking to himself with a pleased expression, but in a low and almost inaudible voice, as if divided between the desire to soliloquize after his usual fashion and the fear of awakening the inhabitants of the castle.

Consuelo had not yet considered whether she should address him and beg him to take her to Albert ; and it must be admitted that, amazed as she was by what she had just seen, uncertain of her next step, joyful at having guessed the truth, but somewhat appalled at the idea of descending into the depths of the earth, she did not feel brave enough just then to carry her

enterprise through. She allowed Zdenko to return as he had come, to take his lantern and disappear singing in a voice which became more assured as he descended farther into the recesses of his retreat: —

“The deliverance is enchained, the consolation is pitiless.”

With throbbing heart and neck outstretched Consuelo was on the point of calling him back a dozen times. She had summoned all her courage for an heroic effort, when it occurred to her that surprise might cause this unfortunate being to slip upon the difficult and dangerous path and bring about a fatal dizziness. She therefore refrained, resolving to have more courage at the proper moment on the morrow.

She waited to see the water rise again, and this time the flow was more rapid. Scarcely a quarter of an hour had passed since she had ceased to hear Zdenko and see the light of his lantern when a dull rumbling, like the sound of distant thunder, became audible, and the water, rushing violently up, boiled madly to the surface. This sudden eruption of the water was so appalling that Consuelo trembled for poor Zdenko and questioned whether in playing with such dangers and controlling such tremendous forces of nature, he did not risk being carried away by the current to reappear upon the surface of the fountain, drowned and crushed like the aquatic plants she had seen floating there.

Still, the process must be very simple. He had only to open and close a flood-gate by placing a

stone on it, perhaps, when he came up, and removing it when he returned. But might not this man, who was always absent-minded and lost in his strange reveries, make a mistake and remove the stone an instant too soon? Did he come by the same passage which served as a channel for the water? "However that may be," thought Consuelo, "I must pass through it with or without him, and that not later than to-morrow night; for far below there is a travailing and suffering soul, which awaits me and is weary with waiting. This was never sung by chance, and it was not without an object that Zdenko, who detests German and can hardly speak it, made use of that language to-day."

She went to bed at last, but through all the remainder of the night she had dreadful nightmares. The fever was growing more violent. She did not notice it, she felt so strong and resolute; but every few moments she awoke with a start, thinking herself back on the steps of the terrible staircase and unable to ascend it, while the water rose roaring beneath her.

She looked so badly in the morning that every one noticed it. The chaplain had confided to the canoness that this agreeable and obliging young person seemed to him slightly deranged, and the good Wenceslawa, who was not accustomed to seeing so much courage and self-devotion about her, began to believe that Porporina was at any rate an exceedingly emotional young person, with a very excitable nervous temperament. She had too much confidence in her

good doors and her faithful keys to have believed very long in Zdenko's appearance two nights before. She therefore spoke sympathetically and affectionately to Consuelo, begging her not to take so deep an interest in the family misfortunes as to lose her health, and endeavoring to give her a hope of her nephew's speedy return which she herself was beginning to lose.

But she was filled with mingled hope and fear when Consuelo replied to her with a look radiant with satisfaction and a smile of gentle pride, —

“You are right to expect it, dear madam. Count Albert is alive and, I hope, well; for in his retreat he still takes an interest in his books and his flowers. I am certain of it — I may almost say that I have proof of it.”

“What do you mean, dear child?” cried the canoness, impressed by her air of conviction. “What have you learned? What have you discovered? Speak, in the name of Heaven, and restore hope to a distracted family!”

“Tell Count Christian that his son is alive and not far from here. It is as true as that I love and respect you.”

The canoness rose to hurry to her brother, who had not yet come downstairs. But a look and a sigh from the chaplain stopped her.

“Let us not lightly impart such joyful tidings to my poor Christian,” said she also with a sigh. “If something were to prevent the accomplishment of

your fair promises, dear child, — ah, it would be a death-blow to that unfortunate father !”

“Do you doubt my word?” replied Consuelo, astonished.

“God forbid, noble Nina ! But you may be mistaken. That has happened to us too often, alas ! You say that you have proof, dear daughter. Can you not tell what it is ?”

“I cannot, — at least it seems to me that I ought not,” said Consuelo, a little embarrassed. “I have discovered a secret to which Count Albert certainly attaches great importance, and I do not think that I should reveal it without his leave.”

“Without his leave !” cried the canoness, looking at the chaplain doubtfully. “Can she have seen him ?”

The chaplain shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly, without comprehending what anguish his incredulity caused the poor canoness.

“I have not seen him,” replied Consuelo, “but I, and you too, shall see him soon, and that is why I fear to delay his return by thwarting his wishes.”

“Heaven send that divine truth dwells in your heart and speaks by your lips, generous creature !” said Wenceslawa, looking at her with anxious and loving eyes. “Keep your secret, if you have one, and restore Albert to us if you can. But I know that if you accomplish it, I will kiss your feet as now I kiss your brow !”

“If she is mad,” said the canoness to the chaplain,

when she was alone with him, "she is nevertheless an angel of goodness, and it seems to me that she is more concerned for our suffering than we ourselves. Ah, father, there is a curse upon this house ! Every noble heart in it is smitten with frenzy, and we are compelled to pity what we most admire."

"I do not deny the good impulses of this young stranger," replied the chaplain. "But do not doubt, madam, that there is madness in her actions. She probably dreamed of Count Albert last night, and gives us her visions for certainties. Beware of exciting the pious and submissive soul of your respected brother by such frivolous assertions. And perhaps, too, it would be well not to encourage Signora Porporina's boldness too far. It might bring her into dangers of a different nature from those which she has braved thus far."

"I do not understand you," said Wenceslawa, with grave simplicity.

"It is difficult to explain," replied the worthy man. "Still, it seems to me that if a secret intimacy, however honest and disinterested, should spring up between this young artist and the noble count" —

"Well?" said the canoness.

"Well, madam, do you not think that feelings of interest and solicitude, which are innocent enough at first, may in course of time and by the help of circumstances and romantic ideas become dangerous to the peace of mind and dignity of the young musician?"

"I should never have thought of that!" said the

canoness, struck by the idea. "Do you think, father, that Porporina could forget her humble and uncertain position in her relations with a man so far above her as my nephew Albert of Rudolstadt?"

"Count Albert of Rudolstadt might unintentionally help her to do it himself, by his way of treating as mere prejudices his respectable advantages of rank and birth."

"You make me seriously anxious," said Wenceslawa, touched in her family pride and vanity of birth — her one failing. "Can the evil have already taken root in this child's heart? Can it be that her agitation and her eagerness to find Albert have a motive less pure than her natural generosity and her affection for us?"

"Not yet, I fancy," replied the chaplain, whose only passion was to play an important part in the family by his counsel and advice, while he preserved an outward appearance of timid respect and obsequious submission. "Nevertheless, my dear daughter, your eyes should be open to the course of events, and your watchfulness should never flag in the presence of such a danger. This delicate duty is fit for you alone, and needs all the prudence and penetration with which Heaven has endowed you."

The canoness was greatly disturbed after this conversation; but her anxiety had a new object. She forgot that Albert was lost to her, perhaps dying, perhaps dead, and thought only of the means of preventing an affection which she herself termed "dis-

proportionate," like the Indian of the fable, who, driven into a tree by terror in the shape of a tiger, amuses himself fighting annoyance, in the shape of a fly buzzing about his head.

All day she kept her eyes fixed on Porporina, following her steps and anxiously weighing all her words. Our heroine — for Consuelo was one at that moment in every sense of the word — saw this, but was far from attributing her anxiety to any other feeling than a doubt of seeing her fulfil her promise to bring back Albert. She did not attempt to conceal her own agitation, for she felt in her conscience that she had reason to be proud of her project rather than to blush for it. The modest confusion which the young count's enthusiasm for her had caused her a few days before had vanished before a serious determination, free from all personal vanity. The bitter sarcasms of Amelia, who suspected her undertaking without knowing its details, made no impression on her. She scarcely heard them, and only replied to them by a smile, leaving to the canoness, whose ears opened wider from hour to hour, the task of remembering them, commenting on them and finding in them a terrible significance.

CHAPTER X.

CONSUELO, seeing that she was watched by Wenceslawa as she had never been before, assumed an expression of indifference which so deceived the can-
oness that later in the day she was able to set out for the Shreckenstein without being observed. Her only idea was to meet Zdenko, to force an explanation with him, and to learn definitely whether he would lead her to Albert. She met him not far from the castle on the road to the Schreckenstein. He seemed to be coming to meet her, and spoke to her very volubly in Bohemian.

"Alas ! I cannot understand you," said Consuelo, when she obtained an opportunity to speak. "I scarcely understand German, that rough language which you hate like slavery, and which is as cruel to me as exile. But since it is our only means of communication, do not refuse to speak it with me, and I will promise to learn Bohemian if you will teach it to me."

At these words, which pleased him, Zdenko became serious, and holding out a hard, dry hand, which Consuelo did not hesitate to press between her own, he said in German, "Good daughter of God, I will teach you my language and all my songs. Which one shall I begin with ?"

Consuelo thought it best to humor him, and said, —

“I wish you to sing me the ballad about Count Albert.”

“There are more than two hundred thousand ballads about my brother Albert,” he replied. “I cannot teach them to you; you would not understand them. I make new ones every day which are never like the old. Ask me for something else.”

“Why should I not understand them? I am consolation. My name is Consuelo for you, do you understand? and for Count Albert, who is the only one here who knows me.”

“You, Consuelo?” said Zdenko, with a mocking laugh. “Oh, you do not know what you are saying! The deliverance is enchained” —

“I know that. The consolation is pitiless. But it is you, Zdenko, who do not know. The deliverance has broken its chains, the consolation has cast off its fetters.”

“Lies, lies! folly, German promises!” replied Zdenko, suddenly stopping his laughter and his gambols. “You do not know how to sing.”

“Yes, I know how to sing,” said Consuelo. “Listen!”

She sang him the first phrase of his song about the three mountains, which she had recollected, with the words, which Amelia had taught her to pronounce. Zdenko listened to her with delight, and said to her with a sigh, —

"I love you dearly, my sister — dearly, dearly ! Shall I teach you another song?"

"Yes, the one about Count Albert, and first in German ; you can teach it to me in Bohemian afterwards."

"How does it begin?" said Zdenko, looking at her roguishly.

Consuelo began the air of the song which he had sung the day before.

"Below, far below, there is a suffering and travailing soul" —

"Oh, that is yesterday's ! I do not recollect it to-day," said Zdenko, interrupting her.

"Well, tell me to-day's."

"The first words ! You must tell me the first words !"

"The first words ? Here they are. Listen ! Count Albert is below, far below, in the grotto of the Shreckenstein" —

She had scarcely uttered these words when Zdenko's expression and attitude changed altogether. His eyes blazed with indignation. He took three steps backwards, raised his arms as if to curse her and began to speak Bohemian to her with all the energy of anger and menace.

Consuelo was frightened at first, but seeing him turn to go away, she tried to call him back and then started to follow him. He turned about furiously, and raising aloft an enormous stone, which he appeared to lift without effort in his thin and shrivelled

hands, he cried to her in German, "Zdenko has never harmed any one. Zdenko would not break the wing of a poor fly, and if a little child wished to kill him, he would let himself be killed by a little child. But if you look at me again, if you say another word to me, wicked creature, liar, Austrian! Zdenko will crush you like a worm, though he have to cast himself afterwards into the torrent, to wash from his body and soul the human blood which he has shed!"

Consuelo was terrified and took to flight. On her way she met a peasant, who, astonished at seeing her run away all pale, as if pursued by something, asked her if she had seen a wolf.

Wishing to learn whether Zdenko was subject to attacks of raging madness, she said that she had met "the innocent," and that he had frightened her.

"You ought not to be afraid of the innocent," said the peasant, smiling at what he took to be a childish fright. "Zdenko is not bad; he is always laughing or singing or telling stories which we cannot understand, but which are very beautiful."

"But does he not get angry sometimes and threaten and throw stones?"

"Never, never," replied the peasant. "That has never happened, and never will. You must not be afraid of Zdenko; he is as harmless as an angel."

When she had recovered her self-possession, Consuelo realized that the peasant must be right, and that she had provoked by an imprudent word the first and only attack of rage which the innocent Zdenko had

ever experienced. She reproached herself for it bitterly. "I spoke too quickly," she said to herself. "I aroused in the peaceful soul of this man, deprived of what they proudly call reason, a suffering which he had never known, and which may now come upon him at any moment. He was only an idiot, and perhaps I have made him mad."

But she became still more sad when she thought of the motives of Zdenko's anger. It was evident now that she had guessed rightly in supposing that Albert's retreat was in the Schreckenstein; but how jealously Albert and Zdenko wished to hide this secret, even from her! She was not excepted, then, from this proscription; she had no influence over Count Albert, and when he called her his consolation, when he took pains to summon her on the day before, by Zdenko's song, and confided to the idiot her name Consuelo, it was only a momentary fancy, and no true and constant aspiration pointed out to him one person rather than another as his deliverer and consolation. This very name "consolation," pronounced by him as if he had divined it, must be only the result of chance. She had never concealed the fact that she was a Spaniard, and that her mother-tongue had always remained more familiar to her than Italian. Albert, deeply moved by her singing, had been able to find no stronger expression than that which conveyed the idea of what his soul longed for, and he had addressed her in a language which he spoke perfectly, and which no one about him could understand except herself.

Consuelo had never deceived herself greatly in regard to all this, but so strange and ingenious an effect of chance had seemed to her to have a providential character, and her imagination had seized on it without much consideration.

Now everything was uncertain once more. Had Albert forgotten, in a new phase of his excitement, the emotion which she had caused him? Would she be henceforth useless to comfort him, powerless to save him? Or was Zdenko, who had seemed to her so intelligent and so earnest thus far in furthering Albert's plans, more hopelessly and seriously deranged than she had been willing to believe? Was he obeying his friend's orders or forgetting them completely when he prevented her from reaching the Schreckenstein, or gaining a knowledge of the truth?

"Well," said Amelia to her in an undertone when she returned, "did you see Albert float by in the clouds? Are you going to bring him down the chimney to-night by some powerful incantation?"

"Perhaps," replied Consuelo, somewhat irritated. It was the first time in her life when she had felt her pride wounded. She had brought to her undertaking so pure a devotion and so exalted an enthusiasm that she was pained at the idea of being scoffed at and despised because she had not succeeded.

She was sad all the evening, and the canoness, who noticed the change, did not fail to attribute it to her fear of having betrayed the fatal passion which had taken root in her heart.

The canoness was strangely mistaken. If Consuelo had felt the slightest touch of a new love, she would not have enjoyed the lively faith and holy confidence which had thus far guided and supported her. On the contrary, she had never, perhaps, suffered so much from the bitter memory of her old passion as at this moment, when she was endeavoring to drive it from her mind by heroic actions and a sort of fanatical charity.

When she went to her room that night, she found on her spinet an old book, stamped with a gilt coat of arms, which she recognized as that which she had seen Zdenko take from Count Albert's study the night before. She opened it at the page where the marker was placed, and found the penitential psalm, "*De profundis clamavi ad te.*" These Latin words were underscored with ink which seemed to be still fresh, for it stuck slightly to the opposite page. She looked through the whole volume, which was a famous old Bible known as the "*Kralice*," published in 1579, and found no other mark in it, no marginal note, nor any letter. But could anything be more significant, more eloquent, than this simple cry from the abyss, from the bowels of the earth, as it were? What a contradiction there was between Albert's express and constant wish and Zdenko's recent behavior.

Consuelo finally decided that Albert, ill and powerless in his subterranean retreat, which she believed to be under the Schreckenstein, must be kept there by Zdenko's insane affection. He was perhaps a victim

to this madman, who showed his love for him, after his own fashion, by keeping him a prisoner, by yielding occasionally to his desire to revisit the light of day, and by bearing his messages to Consuelo, and who, prompted suddenly by some inexplicable fear or fancy, now opposed her efforts to answer Count Albert's summons. "Well," said she, "I will go, though I have to brave real dangers, though I commit an imprudence ridiculous in the eyes of fools and egotists, and though I be humiliated by the indifference of him who calls me! Humiliated? How could that be; if he is really as mad himself as poor Zdenko? I should only have reason to pity them both, and I shall have done my duty. I shall have obeyed the voice of God, which inspires me, and his hand, which is urging me on with irresistible force."

The fever with which she had been filled during the last few days, and which had given place to a painful languor since her unfortunate interview with Zdenko, again took possession of her, body and mind. She recovered all her strength, and after exchanging a few playful words with Amelia, to whom she said nothing concerning either the book or her plans for the night, she left her to go to sleep, and set out for the Fountain of Tears, provided with a little dark lantern which she had procured that morning.

She waited a long while, and was compelled by the cold to go into Count Albert's study several times to warm her stiffened frame. She ventured to cast a glance at the immense collection of books, not ranged

upon shelves as in a library, but thrown pell-mell upon the floor in the middle of the room, as if in contempt and disgust. She opened a few of them at random. Nearly all were in Latin, and Consuelo could only presume that they were controversial religious works, published by the Roman Church, or approved by it. She was trying to understand the titles, when she heard the bubbling of the water in the fountain. She hastened thither, closed her lantern, hid behind the balustrade, and awaited Zdenko's arrival. This time he did not stop either on the terrace or in the study. He went through both rooms, and passed out of Albert's apartment to go and listen, as Consuelo learned later, at the doors of the oratory and of Count Christian's bedroom, to ascertain whether the old man was praying sorrowfully or reposing peacefully. It was a care which he often took of his own accord, and without Albert's suggestion, as will be seen by what follows.

Consuelo did not pause to consider what course she should pursue ; her plan was already formed. She no longer trusted to Zdenko's reason or to his good-will. She wished to reach him whom she believed to be a prisoner alone and unguarded. There was, doubtless, but one path beneath the earth between the cistern and the Schreckenstein. Though the road might be difficult or dangerous, it was at least practicable (since Zdenko went over it every night), and especially with a light, and Consuelo had provided herself with candles, flint, a steel and tinder, in case of accident.

What made her still more certain of reaching the Schreckenstein by this underground way was an old story which she had heard the canoness tell of a siege formerly sustained by the Teutonic order. "These knights," said Wenceslaw, "had in their refectory a cistern which supplied them with water from the neighboring mountain; and when their spies wished to go out to reconnoitre the enemy, they shut off the water from the cistern, passed through its underground conduits, and emerged in a village which belonged to them." Consuelo recollected that according to popular tradition, the village which had been situated on the Schreckenstein had belonged to the Castle of the Giants, and had had a secret communication with it in time of siege. She was, therefore, logical in seeking this communication and this issue.

She profited by Zdenko's absence to descend into the well. She first knelt down, commended her soul to God, made the sign of the cross, as she had done at the San-Samuel Theatre before making her first appearance upon the stage, and then she went bravely down the steep and winding stair, seeking for the points of support in the wall which she had seen Zdenko grasp, and taking care not to look down for fear of dizziness. She reached the iron chain without accident; when she caught hold of it, she felt safe, and had the courage to look down the well. There was still water in it, and the discovery of this fact frightened her for a moment. But she quickly reflected that the pit might be very deep, while the

opening into the passage by which Zdenko came was probably not far below the surface. She had already gone down fifty steps with that skill and activity which do not belong to young girls brought up in drawing-rooms, but which are acquired in their games by the children of the people, and which endow them throughout their lives with bold confidence. The only real danger was that of slipping on the damp stones. Consuelo had found an old broad-brimmed hat which the baron had long worn in hunting. She had cut it up and made soles which she had fastened to her shoes with strings, after the fashion of cothurni. She had noticed that Zdenko wore similar soles on his last nocturnal expedition, and it was thanks to these that he walked noiselessly on the castle floors, seeming to glide like a shadow rather than to tread like a man. The Hussites formerly shod their spies in this way, and even their horses, when they attempted to surprise the enemy.

At the fifty-second step, Consuelo found a larger flag-stone and a low archway. She did not hesitate to go in, and advanced stooping through a low and narrow gallery, still damp with the water which had passed through it, and strongly built by the hand of man.

She went on without an obstacle and without fear for about five minutes, when she seemed to hear a slight noise behind her. Perhaps it was Zdenko who had come down again and had taken the road to the Schreckenstein. But she was some distance in ad-

vance of him, and she quickened her steps so as not to be overtaken by this dangerous travelling-companion. He could not suspect that she was in front of him. He had no reason to run after her, and while he was amusing himself in singing and muttering his complaints and his endless stories, she would have time to reach her destination and place herself under Albert's protection.

But the noise behind her increased, and began to resemble the rumbling of water in violent motion. What could have happened? Had Zdenko discovered her design? Had he opened the flood-gates to stop and engulf her? He could not have done that until he had passed through himself, and he was still behind her. Yet this reflection was not very reassuring, for Zdenko was quite capable of sacrificing his own life and drowning with her rather than that Albert's retreat should be revealed. Still, Consuelo had seen no lever, no flood-gate, no stone, even, upon her road which could have held back the water and then let it loose. The water could only be before her, and the noise came from behind her, — it swelled, rose and drew nearer with a roar like thunder.

Suddenly Consuelo made the horrible discovery that the gallery descended, at first with a gentle decline, and then more rapidly. The unfortunate creature had mistaken her road. In her hurry, and amid the thick vapor which rose from the bottom of the cistern, she had not perceived a second archway, much larger and situated opposite to the one which

she had taken. She had entered the channel which served to carry off the water of the cistern, instead of going up that which led to the reservoir or the spring. Zdenko, going off in the opposite direction, had quietly opened the gate, the water was falling into the cistern, which was already full up to the outlet, and the stream was beginning to pour into the gallery down which Consuelo was flying appalled and almost frozen with fright. Soon this gallery, whose size was measured so that the cistern might become full by losing less water than it received, would become filled in its turn. In a moment it would be inundated, and its floor still sank towards the chasm into which the water was ultimately to fall. The roof, still dripping, showed clearly that the water entirely filled it, that there was no safety possible, and that the speed of her flight would not save the unhappy fugitive from the torrent which pursued her. The air was already cut off by the mass of water which was coming noisily on. A stifling heat stopped her breath, and united with fear and despair in paralyzing her. Already the roaring of the unchained waters was in Consuelo's ears, and a reddish foam, the sinister forerunner of the flood, was rushing along the pavement, and outstripping the uncertain flight of the despairing victim.

CHAPTER XI.

"O MOTHER!" she cried, "take me to your arms. O Anzoletto, how dearly I have loved you! O God, compensate me in a better life!"

Hardly had she raised this cry of agony to heaven, when she stumbled against an unexpected obstacle. Oh, joy! oh, heavenly mercy! It is a staircase, steep and narrow, which rises from one side of the gallery, and up which she flies, fear and hope lending her wings. The roof rises above her, the torrent roars by, swallows up the first ten steps of the flight which Consuelo has had time to climb, wets to the ankles the active feet which are flying from it, and reaching at last the top of the lower roof is swallowed up in darkness, and falls with a fearful noise into a deep reservoir upon which the heroic child looks down from a little platform which she has reached upon her knees and in the dark.

For her lantern had gone out. A furious blast preceded the on-rushing mass of water. Consuelo had fallen on the last step, sustained thus far by the instinct of self-preservation, but still ignorant whether the noise of the cataract was a new disaster which yet threatened her, and whether the cold rain which fell upon her and bathed her hair was not the icy hand of death, outstretched upon her head.

The reservoir fills up gradually, however, until other outlets are reached, which bear away the water still farther into the bowels of the earth. The noise diminishes, the vapor grows thinner and a deep murmur, harmonious rather than terrible, spreads through the cavern. Consuelo, with trembling fingers, has succeeded in relighting her lantern. Her heart still beats violently, but her courage has returned. She thanks God and her mother upon her knees, and at last, casting the tremulous light of her lantern upon the surrounding objects, begins to examine the place in which she finds herself.

A vast grotto, formed by the hand of Nature, covers an abyss into which falls the water from the distant spring of the Schreckenstein, and from which it is carried away into the heart of the mountain. This abyss is so deep that she cannot see the water at its bottom ; but a stone thrown into it falls for a space of two minutes and plunges into the waves with a noise like the explosion of a cannon. The echoes of the cavern repeat the sound for a long while, and the plashing of the invisible water lasts longer still. It sounds like the baying of a pack of diabolical hounds. On one side of the grotto a narrow and dangerous path, carved in the rock, winds along the precipice, and leads into a new gallery, not wrought by the hand of men, which is directed away from the water and towards higher ground. This is the road which Consuelo has to take. There is no other, for the water has closed that by which she came. It is impossible

to await Zdenko's return in the grotto, for the dampness would be fatal, and already the flame of her lantern is beginning to grow dim and flicker, and threatens to go out without the possibility of relighting it.

Consuelo is not paralyzed by the horror of this situation. She is convinced that she is no longer on the road to the Schreckenstein. The subterranean passages which open before her are a freak of nature, impassable, or leading to a labyrinth out of which she may never find her way. Still, she must venture into them, if only to find a more wholesome resting-place until the following night, when Zdenko will return and shut off the current. The gallery will be emptied, and the captive may retrace her steps and see once more the light of the stars.

Consuelo, therefore, plunged with renewed confidence into the mysterious passage, carefully noting the accidents of the ground and attempting to follow an upward path, without allowing herself to be turned aside by the galleries which seemed more spacious and more direct, and which she met at almost every step. In this way she was sure of not meeting the water again, and of being able to find her way back.

The path was through a thousand obstacles. Enormous rocks encumbered her road and wounded her feet; gigantic bats, awakened from their sleep by the light of the lantern, beat against it in battalions, and hovered about the wayfarer like spirits of darkness. After the first surprise she felt her courage increase

with each new shock. At times she would climb over vast blocks fallen from the lofty roof where others threatened her, trembling to their fall ; anon, the passage grew so small that she was obliged to crawl through a rarefied and burning atmosphere. She had gone on in this way for half an hour when, as she turned a narrow angle where her slender and flexible form could scarce find room to pass, she fell from Scylla into Charybdis by finding herself face to face with Zdenko. At first the idiot was petrified with surprise and frozen with terror, but soon he became indignant and furious and threatening as she had already seen him.

In this labyrinth, amid countless obstacles, it was impossible to fly. Consuelo thought of defending herself hand to hand against an attempt at murder. Zdenko's rolling eyes and foaming mouth showed clearly enough that this time he would not stop at threats. Suddenly, he formed a strangely savage resolution ; he began to pick up great stones and place them one upon another between himself and Consuelo, to wall in the narrow passage in which she stood. In this way, if he did not empty the cistern for several days, he was sure to cause her to perish from hunger, like a bee which shuts up an inquisitive hornet in its cell by placing a wall of wax across its entrance.

But it was with granite that Zdenko builded, and he worked with marvellous rapidity. The strength which this slender and apparently feeble man displayed in

lifting and arranging his blocks proved to Consuelo that resistance was useless, and that she might better try to find another outlet by retracing her steps than to cause him to proceed to the last extremities by irritating him. She attempted to move him, to persuade him and to subdue him by words.

"Zdenko," she said, "what are you doing, madman? Albert will be angry with you for my death. Albert is waiting for me and calling me. I am his friend, his consolation, his safety. In destroying me you destroy your brother!"

But Zdenko, fearing that he might yield, and resolved to continue his work, began to sing words in his own language to a bright and lively air, still building his cyclopean wall with swift and untiring hands.

A single stone was wanting to complete the structure. Consuelo watched him with terror. "Never," she thought, "can I tear down this wall; I should need a giant's strength." The last stone was placed in position, and then she perceived that Zdenko was building a second wall behind the first. He intended to heap a perfect fortress between her and Albert. He was still singing, and appeared to take extreme pleasure in his work.

At last a marvellous inspiration came to Consuelo. She recollected the famous heretical formula which Amelia had explained to her, and which had so scandalized the chaplain.

"Zdenko!" she cried in Bohemian through a crack in the wall which already separated her from him;

“friend Zdenko, may he who has been wronged salute you !”

The words acted like a charm on the idiot. Heaving a deep sigh, he dropped the great stone which he held, and began to tear down his wall more swiftly than he had built it ; then, stretching out his hand to Consuelo, he helped her in silence over the ruins, after which he looked at her attentively, sighed strangely and presented her with three keys fastened together with a red ribbon, as he pointed to the road before her, saying, —

“May he who has been wronged salute you !”

“Will you not be my guide?” she said. “Take me to your master.”

Zdenko shook his head and answered, “I have no master ; I had a friend, but you are taking him from me. His destiny is being accomplished. Go where God sends you ; I will weep here until you return.”

Then, sitting down upon his ruined wall, he placed his head in his hands and refused to speak another word.

Consuelo did not linger to console him. She feared a return of his rage, and profiting by his momentary submission, and sure at last of being on the road to the Schreckenstein, she set out swiftly. Consuelo had not gone far upon her uncertain and painful journey, for Zdenko, coming by a much longer road, had met her at the junction of the two passages which together made the complete circuit of the castle, its large grounds and the hill on which it was situated.

Consuelo little suspected that at that moment she was beneath the park, and yet she had passed beyond the gates and moat by a road which all the canoness's keys and precautions could never again close to her. After following her new path for some distance, she thought of going back and giving up an undertaking in which she had met such dangers and which had been so nearly fatal to her. Perhaps new difficulties were in store for her. Zdenko's ill-will might revive. Suppose he were to pursue her, or build a new wall to prevent her return ! If she abandoned her project, and asked him to lead her to the cistern and dry it off for her, to enable her to return to the castle, she would probably find him docile and willing. But she had not recovered sufficiently from her fright to risk another interview with this fantastic being. The farther she got from him the more she became afraid of him ; and after having escaped his vengeance by a miraculous inspiration she shuddered at the thought of it. So she fled from him, without courage to attempt to make him obey her, and only hoping for one of the magic doors, the keys of which he had given her, that she might place a barrier between herself and a return of his madness.

But should she not find Albert, that other madman, whom she had obstinately persisted in considering mild and tractable, in a frame of mind towards her similar to Zdenko's ? The whole adventure was surrounded by a veil of mystery, and having recovered from the romantic attraction which had helped to

draw her into it, Consuelo began to ask herself if she was not the maddest of the three for embarking in so dangerous and mysterious an undertaking without the certainty of a favorable result.

Meanwhile she was wending her way through a spacious passage, admirably wrought by the mighty hands of the men of the Middle Ages. The roof was regularly vaulted, and wherever a vein of earth was met it was supported by granite masonry. Consuelo did not stop to admire the solidity of a work which after centuries still defied the hand of time. She did not even wonder how the present owners of the castle could be ignorant of so important a construction. She might have understood it had she recollected that all the historical papers belonging to the family had been burned more than a hundred years before, on the introduction of the reform into Bohemia. But she no longer looked about her, and thought only of her own safety, satisfied at finding a smooth road, fresh air and a free path by which to escape. She still had a considerable distance to traverse, although this direct road to the Schreckenstein was far shorter than the winding mountain-path. She thought it very long, and having lost all idea of direction was uncertain whether the Schreckenstein or some more distant spot would be the end of her journey.

After walking a quarter of an hour she saw the roof rise once more and the masonry come to an end. Yet the lofty grottoes through which lay her road were also the work of man. But they seemed less terrible

than the galleries, for they were filled with vegetation, and the fresh air came into them through innumerable fissures in the rocks. Here, at any rate, were a thousand places where she could hide or escape from an angry pursuer. But a noise of running water made her tremble, and if she could have jested in such a situation, she would have confessed to herself that never had Baron Frederick, on his way from hunting, had such a dread of water as she then felt.

Her reason soon returned to her, however. She had been steadily ascending ever since she had so narrowly escaped drowning at the precipice. Unless Zdenko had at his command some hydraulic machine of marvellous power, he could never turn upon her his terrible auxiliary, the torrent. It was quite evident, too, that she must somewhere meet the stream from the spring, the dam, or the spring itself, and if she had been able to consider more clearly, she would have been astonished at not having yet encountered this mysterious current, this Fountain of Tears, which fed the cistern.

The reason of this was that the stream ran through the veins of the rock, and that the gallery, which ran at right angles to it, crossed it only near the cistern at first, and then at the Schreckenstein, as Consuelo at last discovered. The dam was therefore behind her, on the road which Zdenko had travelled alone, and Consuelo was approaching the spring which for ages no man had seen but Albert and Zdenko. She soon

came to the stream, and this time passed along beside it without fear and without danger.

A path of fine sand ran by the course of this limpid rill, which flowed with a pleasant sound in its narrow bed. Here the hand of man appeared once more. The path was raised on a slope, bordered by rich, fertile earth, while aquatic plants, great wall-flowers and briars bloomed in this sheltered spot unharmed by the inclemency of the season, and bordered the stream with a verdant margin. The outside air came in by a multitude of cracks and fissures, sufficient to support the life of the vegetation, but too narrow to admit a curious glance from without. It was a sort of natural hot-house, preserved by its roof from the cold and snow, but well aired enough by a thousand imperceptible ventilators. One would have said that a tender care protected the life of these lovely plants, and rid the sand which the torrent cast upon its banks of pebbles which might wound the foot; and the supposition would have been a true one. It was Zdenko who had rendered the approach to Albert's retreat beautiful, easy and secure.

Consuelo began to feel the beneficent influence which the brighter and more poetic appearance of her surroundings exercised upon her imagination, which was yet disturbed by her fears. As she saw the pale rays of the moon entering here and there through the rifts in the rocks and breaking upon the trembling wavelets, as she felt the fresh forest air breathing upon the motionless plants which the water did not reach, as

she found herself nearer the surface of the earth, her courage revived, and the reception which was awaiting her at the end of her journey presented itself to her mind in brighter colors. At last she saw the path turn suddenly away from the bank, lead into a short gallery of new masonry and end at a little door which seemed of metal, so cold was it, and which was prettily embowered in an arch of ivy.

When Consuelo found herself at the end of her fatigues and her doubts, when she leaned her weary hand against this last obstacle, which would yield in a moment, — for she held the key of it, — she paused and felt a timidity harder to overcome than all her terror. She was about to enter a place concealed from every human eye and mind, to break in upon the slumbers or the revery of a man whom she hardly knew, who was neither her father, her brother nor her husband, who loved her, perhaps, but whom she neither could nor would love. “God has led me here,” she thought, “through dreadful dangers. It is by his will yet more than by his protection that I have reached this spot. I have come with a fervid soul, a resolution full of charity, a tranquil heart, a clear conscience and entire disinterestedness. Death, perhaps, is awaiting me, and yet the thought does not frighten me. My life is desolate, and I could lose it without much regret ; I proved it but a moment ago, and for an hour I have met the prospect of a frightful death with a calmness for which I could never have hoped. Perhaps it is a blessing which God sends me

in my last moments. I am, it may be, about to fall beneath the blows of a madman, and I go to meet my fate with the firmness of a martyr. I believe sincerely in a future life, and I feel that if I perish here, a victim to a possibly useless but profoundly religious self-devotion, I shall be recompensed in a happier world. What stops me? Why do I feel this strange emotion, as if I were about to commit a fault, and blush before him whom I have come to save?"

It was thus that Consuelo struggled with herself, too modest to understand her own modesty, and almost reproached herself for the delicacy of her feelings. Yet it never occurred to her that she might be incurring a danger worse than death. Her chastity never permitted her to realize that she might become the victim of a madman's passions, but she felt an instinctive fear of appearing to obey a sentiment less lofty and divine than that which actuated her. She placed the key in the lock, but she tried a dozen times to turn it without having courage to do it. An overwhelming fatigue, a fainting of her whole being, caused her to lose her resolution at the moment when she was to be rewarded for it either on earth, by accomplishing a great deed of charity, or in heaven, by a sublime death.

CHAPTER XII.

HER mind, however, was made up. She had three keys, and there must therefore be three doors and two rooms to pass through before reaching that in which she believed Albert to be held a prisoner. She would still have time to turn back if her courage failed her.

She entered an arched chamber which contained no furniture but a bed of dried fern, over which was cast a sheepskin. An old-fashioned pair of shoes, remarkably dilapidated, indicated that it was Zdenko's bedroom. She also recognized the little basket which she had taken, filled with fruit, to the Rock of Terror, and which had disappeared at the end of two days. She resolved to open the next door, after carefully closing the first one ; for she still thought with dread of the possible return of the ferocious occupant of this chamber. The second apartment which she entered was also vaulted, but its walls were hung with matting and moss-covered wicker-work. A stove diffused a moderate heat, and it was no doubt its chimney, wrought in the rock, which produced the fitful glare on the summit of the Schreckenstein by which Consuelo had been puzzled. Albert's bed, like Zdenko's, was formed of a heap of dry leaves and grasses ; but Zdenko had covered it with magnificent bearskins, in spite of the absolute equality which Albert exacted

in their relations, and to which Zdenko consented in all that did not conflict with the passionate affection which he bore him and the excess of care which he gave him over himself. Consuelo was received in this room by Cynabre, who, when he heard the key turn in the lock, took his stand upon the threshold with ears erect and questioning eyes. But Cynabre had received a peculiar education from his master; he was a friend, not a guardian. Barking and howling had been so severely forbidden from his very infancy, that he had quite lost this habit natural to his kind. If any one had approached Albert with evil intentions, he would have recovered his voice; if they had attacked him, he would have defended him furiously. But prudent and circumspect like all solitary beings, he never made the least noise without being sure of his ground, and without carefully smelling and examining those whom he suspected. He approached Consuelo with a penetrating look which had in it something human, sniffed her clothes, and especially the hand which had been holding the keys that Zdenko had touched, and completely reassured by this circumstance, he gave evidence of the kindly recollection he had of her by placing his great hairy paws upon her shoulders with cordial but silent joy, and slowly sweeping the ground with his superb tail. After this grave and courteous reception, he went off to lie down again upon the border of the bearskin which covered his master's bed, and stretched himself out there with the indifference of old age, yet not without

following Consuelo's every step and motion with his eyes.

Before venturing to approach the third door, Consuelo cast a glance at the arrangement of this hermitage, to seek in it some revelation of the mental state of the man who occupied it. She found no sign of madness or despair. A great cleanliness and order reigned in it. A cloak and a change of raiment hung upon a pair of urus horns, curiosities which Albert had brought back with him from Lithuania, and which served him as a rack. His numerous books were neatly arranged on shelves of rough board, supported on brackets artistically wrought by a rustic but intelligent hand.

The table and two chairs were of the same material and the same workmanship. An herbarium and some old music-books, with titles and words in the Slav language, completed the disclosure of the peaceful, simple and studious habits of the anchorite. An iron lamp, curious from its age, was hung in the middle of the roof, and burned in the eternal night of this melancholy sanctuary.

Consuelo also noticed that there were no arms in this place. In spite of the fondness of the wealthy inhabitants of these forests for the chase, and for the rich implements which belong to that pastime, Albert had neither a gun nor a knife. His old dog had never learned the "great science," and consequently was an object of contempt and pity to Baron Frederick. Albert had a horror of blood, and although he seemed

to enjoy life less than any one else; he had a religious and unbounded respect for the idea of life in general. He could neither kill himself nor see any one else kill even the lowest animals. He would have liked all the natural sciences, but he stopped at botany and mineralogy. Even entomology seemed to him too cruel, and he could never sacrifice the life of an insect to his curiosity.

Consuelo knew these peculiarities, and she recollected them when she saw the instruments of Albert's innocent occupations. "No, I shall not be afraid," she said to herself. "This is the cell of a saint, not the dungeon of a madman." But the more she was reassured concerning his mental malady, the more embarrassed and confused she became. She almost regretted that she had not found there a deranged or dying man, and the certainty of appearing before a sane and strong one caused her to hesitate more and more.

She had been thinking for a few moments, not knowing how to announce herself, when the sound of an admirable instrument struck upon her ear. It was a skilful hand playing a sublimely sad and grand air upon a Stradivarius. Never had Consuelo heard so perfect a violin or so touching and simple a performer. The air was unknown to her, but from its strange and primitive form she fancied that it must be older than the oldest music she knew. She listened with delight, and now comprehended how Albert had understood her so well at the very first phrase she had sung. It

was because he had an insight into true, great music. He might not be learned in every respect, he might not know the marvellous resources of the art, but he had in him the divine fire, the understanding and the love of the beautiful. When he had finished, Consuelo felt entirely reassured, and, animated by a livelier sympathy, was about to knock at the door which still separated her from him when it opened slowly, and she saw the young count advance deliberately, with drooping head, his eyes cast upon the ground and his violin and bow in his hands, which hung by his side. His paleness was frightful, his hair and his dress in a disorder which Consuelo had never yet seen. His abstracted air, his broken and dejected manner, the despairing indifference of his movements, indicated, if not complete derangement, at least the disorder and abandonment of his will. One might have thought him one of those spectres, silent and deprived of memory, in whom the Slav races believe, who come into houses mechanically at night, and who are seen acting inconsequentially, and aimlessly obeying, as if instinctively, the old habits of their lives, without recognizing and without seeing their terrified friends and servants, who flee from them or watch them in silence, frozen by amazement and fear.

Thus it was with Consuelo when she saw Count Albert and perceived that he did not see her, though she was only a few paces from him. Cynabre had risen and was licking his master's hand. Albert spoke some kind words in Bohemian; then, following with

his glance the movements of the dog, who had turned with his discreet caresses to Consuelo, he looked attentively at the feet of the young girl, which were then shod almost exactly like Zdenko's, and without raising his head said some words in Bohemian to her which she did not understand, but which seemed a question, and which ended with her name.

Seeing him in this condition, Consuelo felt her timidity disappear. Moved wholly by compassion, she beheld only the heart-broken invalid who was still calling for her without recognizing her; and placing her hand confidently and firmly upon the young man's arm, she said to him in Spanish, with her pure and vibrant voice, "Here is Consuelo."

CHAPTER XIII.

SCARCELY had Consuelo spoken her name, when Count Albert, raising his eyes and looking in her face, suddenly changed his attitude and his expression. He allowed his precious violin to fall to the ground with as much indifference as if he had never known its use, and clasping his hands with an expression of profound tenderness and respectful sorrow, said, as he heaved a sigh which seemed to rend his breast, —

“Do I at last see you again in this place of exile and suffering, my poor Wanda? Dear, dear, unhappy sister! Unfortunate victim whom I avenged too late, and was unable to defend. Ah, you well know that the dastard who outraged you perished in torment, and that my pitiless hand was bathed in the blood of his accomplices! I have opened a deep vein of the accursed Church; I have washed out the insult to you, to me and to my people in rivers of blood. What more do you wish, uneasy and vindictive soul? The time for zeal and anger is past; we have come to the day of repentance and expiation. Ask of me tears and prayers, but ask me no more for blood. Henceforth I have a horror of blood, and never again will I spill it. No, no, not a single drop! Hereafter John Ziska will fill his cup with unceasing tears and bitter sighs alone.”

While speaking thus, with haggard eyes and features animated by a sudden excitement, Albert walked around Consuelo, and recoiled with terror whenever she made a motion to interrupt this strange apostrophe. Consuelo needed but little reflection to understand the turn her host's insanity had taken. She had heard the story of John Ziska often enough to know that a sister of this redoubtable fanatic, a nun before the breaking out of the Hussite War, had died from grief and shame in her convent, outraged by a vile monk, and that Ziska's life had been a long and solemn vengeance for this crime. At the present moment, Albert, recalled to his ruling fancy by some transition of ideas, I know not what, thought himself John Ziska, and was addressing her as the shade of Wanda, his unfortunate sister.

"Albert," said she, resolving not to destroy his illusion suddenly, — "for your name is no longer John, as mine is no longer Wanda, — look at me well, and perceive that I have changed my face and character, as you have. I come to recall to you what you have just told me. Yes, the time for zeal and anger is past. Human justice is more than satisfied, and it is the day of divine justice which I now declare to you. God commands us to forgive and forget. God is offended at these mournful memories, at your persistence in exercising a faculty which he has not given to other men, — this minute recollection which you preserve of your former existence. He withdraws it from you because you abuse it. Do

you hear me, Albert, and do you understand me now?"

"O mother!" replied Albert, pale and trembling, falling upon his knees, and still looking at Consuelo with fright, "I hear and understand your words. I see that you have transformed yourself to convince and subdue me. No, you are no longer Wanda Ziska, the violated virgin, the mourning nun. You are Wanda of Prachalitz, whom men call Countess of Rudolstadt, and who bore in your bosom the unfortunate being whom they now call Albert."

"It is not by a caprice of men that you are called thus," said Consuelo firmly, "for it is God who has caused you to live again under other conditions and with new duties. You do not know these duties, Albert, or else you despise them. You reascend the course of ages with impious pride; you aspire to learn the secrets of fate; you think to equal God by embracing the present and past in a single glance. But I tell you — and I am inspired by truth and faith — that this retrograde thought is criminal and presumptuous."

"Your supernatural memory is an illusion. You have mistaken a few vague and wandering gleams for a certainty, and your imagination has deceived you. Your pride built an edifice of chimeras when you attributed to yourself the mighty deeds of your ancestors. Beware lest you be not what you believe yourself. Dread, lest to punish you Eternal Wisdom may open your eyes for a moment, and show you in your

former life less noble faults and less glorious causes for remorse than those of which you dare to boast."

Albert listened to this speech in a timid absorption, his face in his hands and his knees on the earth.

"Speak, speak, voice of heaven, which I hear, but no longer recognize!" he murmured in choking accents. "If you are the angel of the mountain, if you are, as I believe, the celestial figure which has so often appeared to me above the Rock of Terror, speak! Order my will, my conscience, my imagination! You know that I seek the light with anguish, and that if I go astray in the darkness, it is because I try to banish it to win you!"

"The true road for you, Albert, is by humility, trust and submission to the eternal decrees of a wisdom incomprehensible to men. Renounce in your soul, and renounce it firmly once for all, the wish to know yourself beyond this passing existence which is imposed upon you, and you will become once more pleasing to God, useful to your fellow-men and at peace with yourself. Humble your haughty knowledge, and, without losing faith in your immortality, without questioning the Divine Goodness, which forgives the past and protects the future, devote yourself to enriching and humanizing this life which you despise when you ought to respect it, and give yourself wholly to it with all your strength, self-sacrifice and charity. Now, Albert, look at me, and may your eyes be opened I am no longer your sister nor your mother; I am a friend whom God has sent you, and whom he has led

here by miraculous paths to rescue you from pride and madness. Look at me, and tell me, on your soul and conscience, who I am, and what I am called."

Albert, trembling and distracted, raised his head and looked at her again, but with less wildness and terror than before.

"You reveal a new world to me," he said. "By your wise words you confound my reason, which, to my sorrow, I thought superior to that of other men, and you command me to know and understand the present age and human affairs. I cannot do it. To lose the memory of certain phases of my life I have to undergo terrible crises, and to recover the consciousness of a new phase I have to transform myself by efforts which lead me to death's door. If you command me, in the name of a power which I feel to be superior to my own, to assimilate my thought to yours, I must obey. But I know these dreadful struggles, and I know that death is at the end of them. Have pity on me, you who control me by a sovereign charm; help me, or I perish! Tell me who you are, for I do not know you. I do not recollect having ever seen you, and I do not know whether you are man or woman. You are there before me like a mysterious statue, the original of which I strive in vain to find in my memory. Help me, help me, for I feel that I am dying!"

While speaking thus, Albert, whose face had at first been tinged with a feverish flush, became frightfully pale. He stretched out his hands to Consuelo, but

instantly lowered them towards the ground to find support, as if he had been stricken by sudden faintness.

As Consuelo began to become familiar with the peculiarities of his mental disease, she felt herself armed with new strength and wisdom. She took his hand, and forcing him to rise, led him to a seat beside the table. He sank into it, prostrated by excessive exhaustion, and bent forward as if about to swoon. The struggle of which he had spoken was all too real. He had the power to recover his reason and repel the suggestions of the fever which devoured his brain, but he succeeded in this only by efforts and sufferings which exhausted his vitality. When the reaction occurred spontaneously, he emerged from it refreshed and restored ; but when he induced it by an effort of his will, which was still powerful, his strength failed in the struggle and he fell into a catalepsy. Consuelo understood what was occurring within him, and placing her cold hand upon his burning head, said, —

“Albert, I know you, and that is enough. I take an interest in you, and that ought to suffice you for the present. I forbid you to make any effort of will to recognize me or speak to me. Only listen to me, and if my words seem obscure, wait until I explain, and do not be in haste to understand them. I only ask of you passive submission and the entire surrender of your thoughts. Can you descend into your heart and concentrate your whole being there?”

"Oh, what good you do me!" replied Albert. "Speak to me again; speak to me ever thus! You hold my soul in your hands. Keep it, whoever you are; let it not escape, for it would fly to the gates of eternity, and break itself against them. Tell me who you are, — tell me quickly; and if I do not understand, explain it to me, for in spite of myself I am seeking to know it, and it agitates me."

"I am Consuelo," replied the young girl, "and you know it, since you instinctively speak to me in a language which I alone of those about you can understand. I am a friend for whom you have long waited, and whom you recognized one day as she sang. On that day you left your family and came to hide yourself here. Since that day I have sought for you, and you made Zdenko call me repeatedly, without his being willing to lead me to you, though he obeyed your orders in other respects. I have reached you through a thousand dangers."

"You could never have reached me if Zdenko had been unwilling," said Albert, raising his weary frame from the table against which he had fallen. "You are a dream. I see it clearly, and all that I hear is happening only in my imagination. O God! you lull me with deceitful joys, and suddenly the disorder and incoherence of my dream are revealed to me, and I awake to find myself alone, — alone in the world with my despair and my madness! Oh, Consuelo, Consuelo! fatal but delicious dream, where is the being who bears your name, and who sometimes wears your face?"

No, you exist only in my brain, and you are the child of my delirium ! ”

Albert sank again upon his outstretched arms, which stiffened and became cold as marble.

Consuelo saw that the lethargic attack was approaching, and she herself felt so faint and exhausted that she feared lest she should not have the power to ward it off. She attempted to chafe Albert's hands in her own, which had scarcely more life than his.

“ My God,” said she in a faint voice and with a breaking heart, “ assist two unfortunate beings who can do but little for one another ! ”

She saw herself alone, locked in with a dying man, and with no help possible for him or for herself, save from Zdenko, whose return seemed to her more frightful than desirable. The prayer seemed to fill Albert with an unexpected emotion.

“ Some one is praying beside me,” said he, striving to raise his languid head. “ I am not alone ! Oh, no ! I am not alone,” he added, looking at Consuelo's hand, intertwined with his own. “ Helping hand, mysterious pity, human, brotherly sympathy ! You make my agony very light and my heart very grateful ! ”

He pressed his icy lips to Consuelo's hand, and remained in this position for a long while.

A feeling of modesty restored Consuelo to the consciousness of life. She dared not withdraw her hand from this unfortunate being, but divided between her embarrassment and her exhaustion, and unable longer

to remain erect, she was compelled to lean upon Albert, and to place her other hand upon his shoulder.

"I feel myself reviving," said Albert, after a few moments; "I seem to be in my mother's arms! Oh, Aunt Wenceslawa, if it is you who are beside me, pardon me for having forgotten you, — you and my father and all my family, whose very names had gone out of my memory! I am coming back to you; do not leave me, but give me back Consuelo, Consuelo for whom I had waited so long, whom at last I found, whom I find no longer and without whom I cannot live!"

Consuelo wished to speak to him, but as memory and strength returned to Albert her own life seemed to fade away. So many terrors, fatigues, emotions and superhuman efforts had exhausted her, and she could struggle no longer. Her words died upon her lips, she felt her knees tremble and her eyes grow dim. She fell upon her knees beside Albert and her fainting head struck the young man's breast. Then Albert, as if awaking from a dream, saw her, recognized her, uttered a great cry, and arousing himself, pressed her rapturously in his arms. Through the veil of death which seemed to be stretching before her eyes, Consuelo saw his joy, and was not frightened by it. It was the holy and radiant joy of chastity. She closed her eyes and fell into a state which was neither sleeping nor waking, but one of indifference and insensibility towards all present things.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Consuelo recovered her senses, finding herself seated on a somewhat hard couch, and still unable to raise her eyelids, she attempted to collect her thoughts. But her prostration had been so complete that her faculties returned slowly ; and as if the sum of the fatigues and emotions which she had recently undergone had exceeded her strength, she tried in vain to recollect what had happened to her since she left Venice. Even her departure from that adopted country where she had passed such happy days seemed like a dream, and it was a consolation to her (all too fleeting, alas !) to be able to doubt a moment of her exile and the misfortunes which had caused it. She therefore persuaded herself that she was in her poor room in the Corte Minelli, upon her mother's pallet, and that after having had with Anzoletto a violent and bitter scene, a confused recollection of which floated in her memory, she was returning to life and hope as she felt him beside her, heard his breathing broken by sighs, and listened to the tender vows which he spoke to her in a low voice. A languid and delicious joy filled her heart at this thought, and she raised herself with an effort to look at her repentant friend and extend her hand to him. But the hand which she clasped was cold and unfamiliar,

and instead of the smiling sun which she was accustomed to see sending its rosy beams through her white curtain, there was only a sepulchral light, falling from a sombre roof, and floating in a misty atmosphere. She felt beneath her arms the rude spoils of the chase, and, in a horrible silence, Albert's pale face leaned towards her like a spectre.

Consuelo thought that she had gone down alive into the tomb; she closed her eyes, and fell back upon her bed of leaves with a heavy sigh. It took her a few moments longer to understand where she was, and who her sinister host. The fear which her enthusiastic self-devotion had striven against and mastered until now took such possession of her that she was afraid to open her eyes lest she should see the trappings of death and an open tomb before her. She felt something on her brow, and raised her hand to it. It was a garland of leaves with which Albert had crowned her. She took it off to look at it, and saw that it was a branch of cypress.

"I thought you dead, O my soul, my consolation!" said Albert, kneeling beside her; "and I wished, before following you, to deck you with the emblems of marriage. No flowers grow about me, Consuelo. The black cypresses were the only branches from which my hand could pluck your crown of betrothal. There it is; do not reject it. If we are to die here, let me swear to you that, restored to life, I should have had no other bride but you, and that I die with you, united to you by indissoluble vows."

"Betrothed ! united !" cried the terrified Consuelo, as she cast looks of consternation about her. Who pronounced this union? Who performed this marriage?"

"It is fate, my angel," replied Albert, with inexpressible gentleness and sadness. "Do not attempt to escape from it. It is a very strange fate for you, and still stranger for me. You do not understand me, Consuelo, and yet it is necessary that you learn the truth. You forbade me a little while ago to dwell in the past, and to remember those bygone days which are called the night of time. My being has obeyed you, and henceforth I know nothing of my former lives. But I have examined my present life and know it. I saw it entire at a glance ; it appeared to me in an instant as you lay in the arms of death. Your destiny, Consuelo, is to belong to me, and yet you will never be mine. You do not love me, you never will love me, as I love you. Your love for me is but charity, your devotion but heroism. You are a saint whom God sends to me, and you will never be a woman for me. I must die consumed by a love which you cannot share ; and yet, Consuelo, you will be my bride, as you are already my betrothed, whether we are to die here, and your pity consents to give me this title of husband, which no kiss is ever to seal, or whether we are to see the sun once more, and your conscience commands you to fulfil God's designs towards me."

"Count Albert," said Consuelo, attempting to rise

from this couch which, covered with black bearskins, resembled a funeral pall, "I do not know whether it is the enthusiasm of an exaggerated gratitude or the continuance of your delirium which causes you to speak in this way. I have no more strength to combat your illusions; and if they are to turn against me, who am come at the peril of my life to succor and console you, I feel that I cannot strive with you either for my life or liberty. If the sight of me irritates you, and if God abandons me, may God's will be done! You, who think you know so much, do not know how utterly my life is poisoned, and with how little regret I should sacrifice it!"

"I know that you are very unhappy, my poor saint! I know that you wear upon your brow a crown of thorns which I may not pluck from it. I do not know the cause or the details of your misfortunes, and I do not ask them; but I should love you very little, I should be little worthy of your compassion, if from the very day when first I met you I had not perceived and understood in you the sorrow which fills your soul and imbitters your life. What can you fear from me, Consuelo of my soul? You, so firm and so wise, — you, whom God inspired with the words which subdued and revived me in an instant, must be strangely losing the light of faith and reason, since you dread your friend, your servant, your slave! Come to yourself, my angel; look at me! Here I am at your feet, and forever, with my forehead in the dust. What do you wish? What do you command? Do you

wish to go hence at once, without my following you, without my ever appearing again before you? What sacrifice do you exact? What oath do you wish me to take? I can promise you everything and obey you in everything. Yes, Consuelo, I can even become a tranquil man, submissive and in appearance as reasonable as others. Shall I be less distasteful, less frightful to you in this way? Thus far I have never been able to do what I willed, but henceforth all that you wish will be granted me. I shall die, perhaps, in transforming myself according to your desire, but it is my turn to tell you that my life has always been poisoned, and that I could never regret it in losing it for you."

"Dear and generous Albert," said Consuelo, touched and reassured, "explain yourself more fully, and cause me to know at last the secret of your impenetrable soul. You are in my eyes a man superior to all others; and since the moment when first I saw you, I have felt for you a respect and sympathy which I have no reason to conceal from you. I have heard them call you mad, but I could not believe you so. All that they told me of you added to my esteem and my confidence. Still, I have been compelled to see that you are overwhelmed by a strange and deep-seated mental disorder. I persuaded myself, presumptuously, perhaps, but sincerely, that I could relieve your sufferings. You yourself helped to make me think so. I have come to find you, and now you tell me things concerning us both so profound and so true that they would fill me with unlimited respect if you did not

mingle with them strange sayings, bearing the impress of a fatalism which I could never accept. Can I tell you all without wounding you and making you suffer?"

"Tell me all, Consuelo. I know in advance what you have to say to me."

"Well, I will tell you, for I had resolved to do it. All who love you are in despair for you. They believe that they ought to respect, to be considerate of what they call your madness; they fear to exasperate you by allowing you to see that they are conscious of it, pity it and dread it. I do not so think, and I cannot tremble when I ask you why you, who are so wise, have sometimes the appearance of a madman; why you, who are so good, display in your actions ingratitude and pride; why, being so enlightened and so religious, you give yourself up to the reveries of a diseased and despairing mind; why, in short, you are here alone, buried alive in a dreary cavern, far from your family which is seeking and weeping for you, from your fellow-men, whom you love with a burning charity, from me whom you summoned, whom you say you love, and who never could have reached you without miracles of will and without the protection of Heaven."

"You ask me the secret of my life, the key to my destiny, and you know it better than I, Consuelo. I expected the revelation of my being from you, and you question me! Oh, I understand you! You wish to bring me to a confession, to a wholesome repentance, to a victorious resolution. You shall be obeyed.

But you cannot know, judge and transform me thus in a moment. Give me a few days, a few hours, at least, to teach you and myself whether I am mad or have the use of my reason. Alas, alas ! both are true, and my misfortune is that I cannot doubt it ! But whether I am to lose judgment and will entirely, or whether I can triumph over the demon which besets me, that I cannot know at this moment. Have pity on me, Consuelo ! I am still under the influence of an emotion stronger than myself. I do not know what I have said to you, how many hours have elapsed since you came here, or how you can be here without Zdenko, who was not willing to bring you. I cannot even tell in what world my thoughts were wandering when you appeared to me. Alas ! I cannot reckon for how many weeks I have been shut up here, struggling against unheard-of sufferings, against the torment which is devouring me ! I am no longer even conscious of these sufferings when they are past. They leave behind only a terrible fatigue, a stupor, and a species of dread which I would that I could drive away. Consuelo, let me forget, if only for an instant ! My ideas will become clear, my tongue unbound. I promise it, I swear it ! Break gently to me this light of reality, long eclipsed in frightful darkness, and which my eyes cannot yet bear. You have bidden me concentrate all my life in my heart. Yes, you told me that ; my reason and my memory date only from the moment when you spoke. Well, your words have caused a heavenly calm to descend into my breast.

My heart is all alive now, though my mind still slumbers. I fear to speak to you of myself; I might wander, and frighten you again by my dreams. I wish to live only by sentiment, and it is an unknown life to me. It would be a life of delight if I could give myself up to it without displeasing you. Ah, Consuelo! why did you tell me to concentrate my whole life in my heart? Explain your words yourself; let me be concerned only about you; let me see and understand but you alone; let me love! O God! I love a living creature like myself with all the strength of my being! I can concentrate upon her the ardor and the holiness of my affection! Surely that is happiness enough for me, and I am not mad enough to ask more!"

"Well, dear Albert, repose your poor soul in this peaceful and fraternal affection. God is my witness that you may do so without fear or danger; for I feel for you a fervent friendship, a veneration which the frivolous babble and the vain judgments of the common herd could never shake. You understood, by some divine and mysterious intuition, that my life was desolated by sorrow; you said it, and it is supreme truth which placed the words in your mouth. I cannot love you otherwise than as a brother, but do not say that charity and pity alone inspire me. If humanity and compassion gave me the courage to come here, sympathy and an especial esteem for your virtues also give me the courage and the right to speak to you as I am doing. Therefore put away at once and for always your illusion as to your sen-

timents. Do not speak of love or marriage. My memories make the one impossible ; the difference in our conditions would make the other humiliating and unacceptable to me. By entertaining such dreams you would render my devotion to you rash and perhaps culpable. Let us seal by a sacred promise the engagement which I now make to be your sister, your friend, your consoler, when you are disposed to open your heart to me ; your nurse, when suffering renders you gloomy and silent. Swear to me that you will see nothing else in me, and that you will not love me otherwise ! ”

“ Generous woman,” said Albert, turning pale, “ you count rightly on my courage, and you well know my love when you ask such a promise of me. I should be capable of lying for the first time in my life, I could abase myself even to making a false oath, if you exacted it. But you will not, Consuelo ; you will understand that it would be to add a new agitation to my life, and to my conscience remorse for something which has never yet defiled it. Do not be concerned about the manner in which I love you ; I will ignore it myself ; only, I feel that to take the name of love from this affection would be blasphemy. I submit to all the rest ; I accept your pity, your care, your kindness, your peaceful friendship. I will speak to you only as you permit, and I will not say a single word which can trouble you. I will not have a look for you which need make you lower your eyes. I will never touch your hand, if the contact of my own

displeases you. I will not even brush against your garments, if you fear to be tarnished by my breath. But you would be wrong to treat me with this distrust, and you would do better to encourage in me this gentleness of emotion which revives me, and from which you can have nothing to fear. I can readily understand that your modesty might take alarm at the expression of a love which you are not willing to share ; I know that your pride would repel the evidences of a passion which you are unwilling either to provoke or to encourage. Therefore be undisturbed, and swear fearlessly to be my sister and my consoler ; I swear to be your brother and your servant. Do not ask me to do more ; I shall be neither indiscreet nor importunate. It will be enough for me to know that you can command me and rule me despotically, — not as one rules a brother, but as one disposes of a being who has given himself to her wholly and forever."

CHAPTER XV.

THIS language reassured Consuelo for the present, though it did not leave her without apprehensions for the future. Albert's fanatical self-denial sprang from a deep and invincible passion, concerning which the seriousness of his character and the solemnity of his countenance could leave no doubt. Consuelo, though touched, was deeply disturbed, asking herself whether she could continue to devote herself to the care of a man who was unreservedly and frankly in love with her. She had never thought lightly of relations of this sort, and she saw that no woman could hold them with Albert without grave consequences. She never doubted the honesty of his promises, but the tranquillity which she had hoped to restore to him must be irreconcilable with an ardent love to which she felt unable to respond. She held out her hand to him with a sigh, and sat with her gaze fixed upon the ground in melancholy musing.

"Albert," said she at last, as she raised her eyes to him and found his own filled with an expectation full of pain and sorrow, "you do not know me, or you would not impose upon me a role which suits me so little. Only a woman capable of abusing it would be capable of accepting it. I am neither coquettish nor proud; I do not think that I am vain, and I have no

love of domination. Your love would flatter me if I could share it, and if that were so I would tell you at once. To afflict you by repeated assurances of the contrary is, under the circumstances in which I find you, an act of cold cruelty which you would have done well to spare me the necessity of committing, but which is imposed upon me by my conscience, although my heart detests it and suffers in performing it. Pity me for being compelled to afflict and perhaps to offend you, when I would give my life to restore you to health and happiness."

"I know it, sublime creature," said Albert with a sad smile; "you are so good and so noble that you would give your life for the vilest of men; but your conscience, I well know, will bend before no one. Do not fear to offend me by displaying this inflexibility which I admire, and this stoical coldness which your virtue can preserve in spite of the most touching pity. As for afflicting me — that, Consuelo, you can never do. I have never deceived myself; I am accustomed to the most frightful suffering, and I know that my life must be but a continuation of the most painful sacrifices. Therefore do not treat me as a weak man, as a child without courage and without pride, by repeating to me what I understand perfectly well, — that you can never love me. I know your whole life, Consuelo, though I am ignorant of your name, your family and every material fact concerning you. I have read the history of your soul, and for the rest I care nothing. You have loved, you still love and

you always will love a being of whom I neither know nor wish to know anything, and from whom I will not try to win you unless you command me. But be sure, Consuelo, that you will never belong to him, to me or to yourself. God has appointed for you an isolated existence, whose circumstances I do not foresee, but only its end and aim. A slave and victim to your noble mind, you will win no other reward in this life than the consciousness of your strength and the knowledge of your own goodness. You will be unfortunate in the eyes of the world ; but in spite of everything, you will be the calmest and happiest of human beings, because you will always be the most upright and the best. For the wicked and cowardly alone are to be pitied, dear sister, and the words of Christ will be true as long as humanity is blind and unjust, ‘Blessed are they which are persecuted,’ blessed they which weep and labor in sorrow.”

The power and dignity which shone upon the broad and majestic brow of Albert at that moment exercised so strong an influence upon Consuelo that she forgot the role of haughty sovereign and austere friend which had been imposed upon her, to bow before the authority of this man, inspired by faith and enthusiasm. She could scarcely support herself, broken as she was by fatigue and overcome by emotion. She fell upon her knees, already bending from numbness and lassitude, and clasping her hands, began to pray aloud with fervor.

“If it is Thou, my God,” she cried, “who puttest

this prophecy into the mouth of a holy man, may Thy will be done! In my childhood I asked of Thee happiness under a bright and smiling face; but Thou hast sent it to me under a rough and severe aspect, which I cannot understand. Grant that my eyes may be opened and my heart become submissive. I shall be able to endure this fate, which seems to me so unjust and which is unfolding little by little, and to ask of Thee only what man has the right to expect from Thy love and Thy justice, — faith, hope and charity.”

As she prayed thus, Consuelo was bathed in tears. She did not attempt to restrain them. After such feverish emotions she had need of this outburst, which relieved her, though it left her still weaker. Albert prayed and wept with her, blessing these tears, which he had so long shed in solitude and which at last were mingled with those of a generous and pure being.

“And now,” said Consuelo to him as she arose, “we have thought enough of ourselves. It is time to think of others and remember our duties. I promised to restore you to your family, which is weeping in despair and already praying for you as for one dead. Will you not give them back peace and happiness, my dear Albert? Will you not come with me?”

“Already?” cried the young count bitterly; “separate already? Leave this sacred refuge where God alone is between us, this cell which I love since you have appeared in it, this sanctuary of happiness which I may never find again, to return to the cold and false life of prejudices and proprieties? Ah, not yet,

my soul, my life ! One day, one age more of happiness ! Let me forget here that there exists a world of lies and wickedness which pursues me like a fatal dream. Let me return slowly and by degrees to what they call reason. I do not yet feel strong enough to endure the light of their sun and the sight of their madness. I need to gaze upon you, to listen to you still longer. Besides, I have never left my retreat upon a sudden resolution and without long reflection, — my frightful yet beneficent retreat, scene of a terrible yet salutary expiation to which I hasten without turning my head, into which I plunge with savage joy, and from which I always depart with a hesitation but too well founded and regrets but too lasting ! You do not know what strong ties bind me to this voluntary prison, Consuelo ! You do not know that there is here another self, whom I leave behind, who is the true Albert and who could never go out, — a self that I always find here, whose spectre recalls and importunes me when I am away. Here are my conscience, my faith, my light, my serious life, in a word. I bring here despair, fear, madness ; they will not let go their hold of me and fight fearfully with me. But behind that door is a temple where I conquer them and renew myself. I enter soiled and dizzy, I come out purified, and no one knows what tortures are the price of the submission and patience which I bring back. Do not tear me from here, Consuelo ; suffer me to go away slowly and after prayer."

"Let us go in and pray together ; we will leave im-

mediately afterwards. The hour is late ; day is near, perhaps. They must not know the road by which you return to the castle ; they must not see you come in ; they had best not see us together, for I do not wish to betray the secret of your retreat, Albert, and thus far no one suspects my discovery. I do not wish to be questioned, for I do not wish to lie. I must have the right to preserve a respectful silence towards your family and allow them to believe that my promises were inspired only by dreams and presentiments. If they saw me come back with you, my silence would seem disrespect ; and although I could brave everything for you, Albert, I do not wish unnecessarily to alienate the confidence and affection of your relatives. Let us hasten, therefore ; I am exhausted with fatigue, and if I remained here longer, I might lose my remaining strength, which I need for this trying journey. Come let us pray, I say, and go."

"You are exhausted with fatigue? Rest here, then, my well beloved ! Sleep ! I will watch over you religiously, or if you fear my presence, lock me in yon cave. You can place this iron door between us, and until you call me I will pray for you in my church."

"And while you are praying, while I am resting, your father will undergo long hours of agony, pale and motionless, as I once saw him, bent by age and sorrow, wearing with his feeble knees the stones of his oratory, and seeming to wait till the news of your death should come and draw from him his last breath. And your poor aunt will mount feverishly on all the

towers to seek you with her eyes among the mountain-paths. This morning again they will meet in the castle and separate this evening with despair in their eyes and death in their hearts. Ah, Albert, you cannot love your family, since you make them pine and suffer thus without pity or remorse !”

“ Consuelo, Consuelo !” cried Albert, as if awakening from a dream, “ do not say this, you pain me frightfully. What crime have I committed? What disasters have I caused? Why are they so anxious? How many hours have passed since I left them?”

“ You ask how many hours? Say rather how many days and nights, almost how many weeks.”

“ Days ! nights ! Be silent, Consuelo ; do not tell me all my misfortune. I knew that I lost here a just notion of time, and that the recollection of what passed upon the face of the earth did not descend into this sepulchre ; but I did not think that the duration of this forgetfulness could be measured by days and weeks.”

“ Is it not a voluntary forgetfulness, my friend? Nothing here recalls to you the passing days. The night is eternal here, and you have not even a sand-glass, I fancy, to count the hours. Is not this care to remove all means of measuring time a precaution to escape from the cries of nature and the reproaches of conscience ?”

“ I confess that when I come here I need to put away all that is purely human in me. But I did not know, my God, that sorrow and meditation could so

absorb my being that hours appeared as long as days, or days as short as hours ! What kind of being am I, and why have they never told me of this sad defect of my organization ? ”

“ This defect, on the contrary, is a proof of great intellectual power, but turned from its purpose and devoted to baleful occupations. They determined to hide from you the ills which you caused ; they believed that they should respect your suffering by concealing that of others. But this, to my mind, was to treat you with too little esteem, and to doubt your heart ; and I, who do not doubt it, Albert, conceal nothing from you.”

“ Let us go, Consuelo, let us go ! ” cried Albert, hurriedly throwing his cloak about his shoulders. “ I am an unhappy wretch ! I have caused suffering to a father whom I adore and an aunt whom I love ! I am hardly worthy to see them again. Ah, rather than repeat such cruelty, I would make the sacrifice of never coming here again ! But no ! I am happy, for I have met a friendly heart to warn and restore me ; one who has at last told me the truth about myself, and will always tell it. Is it not so, dearest sister ? ”

“ Always, Albert, I swear it.”

“ Heavenly mercy ! And the being who comes to my rescue is the only one to whom I could have listened and believed ! God knows what he does ! Unconscious of my own madness, I have always thought others mad. Alas ! If my noble father him-

self had told me what you have just said, Consuelo, I should not have believed him ! It is because you alone are truth and life, because you only can convince me and inspire my troubled spirit with the heavenly calmness which flows from you."

"Let us go," said Consuelo, helping him to hook his cloak, which his trembling hand could not fasten to his shoulder.

"Yes, let us go," he said, as with a tender look he watched her perform this friendly office ; "but first, swear to me, Consuelo, that if I return here you will not abandon me ; swear that you will come once more to find me, were it to overwhelm me with reproaches, to call me ingrate, parricide, and to tell me that I am unworthy of your anxiety. Oh, do not leave me a prey to myself ! You see that you have entire control over me, and that a word from your mouth persuades and strengthens me more than would ages of meditation and prayer."

"And you will swear to me," said Consuelo, placing upon his shoulders her hands, emboldened by the thickness of the cloak, and smiling upon him frankly, "that you will never return here without me !"

"You will come back here with me ?" he cried, looking at her passionately, but not daring to put his arms around her ; "swear it to me, and I will take oath never to leave my father's roof without your permission."

"Well, may God hear and receive this mutual promise," said Consuelo joyfully. "We will come

back to pray in your church, Albert, and you will teach me to pray ; for no one has ever taught me, and I have a consuming desire to know God. You will show me heaven, my friend, and I will recall you, when there is need, to earthly things and the duties of human life."

"Divine sister !" said Albert, his eyes bathed in delicious tears, "I have nothing to teach you ; but it is you, on the contrary, who should regenerate me. You will teach me everything, even how to pray. Ah, I no longer need to be alone to lift my heart to God ! No longer shall I need to kneel upon the bones of my ancestors that I may understand and feel immortality. If I but look at you, my revived soul will rise to heaven like a hymn of gratitude or the incense of purification."

Consuelo drew him away ; it was she who opened and closed the doors.

"Here, Cynabre !" said Albert to his faithful companion, holding out to him a lantern better constructed than that with which Consuelo had provided herself, and more appropriate to the kind of journey it was to illumine.

The intelligent animal took the lantern with an air of profound satisfaction, and began to walk in advance at a steady pace, stopping whenever Albert stopped, regulating his speed by his master's, and keeping the middle of the path so as not to strike his precious charge against the rocks.

Consuelo could hardly walk ; she felt quite ex-

hausted, and without the assistance of Albert, who supported and lifted her, she would have fallen a dozen times. They went down the stream from the spring, following its fresh and smiling margin.

"It is Zdenko," said Albert, "who lovingly cares for the naiad of these mysterious grottoes. He smooths her bed, which is often encumbered by pebbles and shells. He tends the pale flowers which bloom beneath her steps, and protects them against her embraces, which are sometimes somewhat rude."

Consuelo looked at the sky through the rifts in the rocks, and saw a star shining.

"It is Aldebaran, the star of the Zingari," said Albert. "Day will not dawn for an hour."

"It is my star," replied Consuelo, "for I am a sort of Zingaro, — not by race, but by condition, my dear count. My mother bore no other name in Venice, though she detested the appellation, which was insulting, according to her Spanish notions. And I was and still am known in that country as the Zingarella."

"Why are you not really a child of that persecuted race?" said Albert. "I should love you still better, if it were possible."

Consuelo, who had thought to do wisely in recalling to the Count of Rudolstadt the difference in their conditions, remembered what Amelia had told her of Albert's sympathy for the poor and vagabond. She feared lest she might have yielded involuntarily to a feeling of instinctive coquetry, and remained silent. But Albert broke the silence in a few moments.

“What you have told me,” he said, “recalls to me, by I know not what chain of ideas, a recollection of my childhood, puerile enough, but which I must tell you, for since I have known you it has recurred to my memory several times with curious obstinacy. Lean more upon me, while I talk to you, dear sister.

“I was about fifteen. I was coming home alone one evening by one of the paths which run beside the Schreckenstein and wind among its spurs on the side towards the castle. I saw before me a tall, thin woman, miserably clad, who bore a burden on her shoulders, and paused from rock to rock to sit down and take breath. I went up to her. She was handsome, though bronzed by the sun and faded by poverty and care. She wore her rags with a sort of mournful pride, and when she held out her hand she seemed rather to command my pity than to implore it. I had nothing in my purse, and I asked her to accompany me to the castle, where I could offer her help, food and a resting-place for the night.

“‘I prefer it so,’ she replied, with a strange accent which I took for that of the wandering Egyptians, for at that period I did not know the languages which I have since learned in my travels. ‘I can repay your hospitality,’ she added, ‘by singing to you the songs of some of the different countries through which I have travelled. I rarely ask alms ; I must be forced to it by extreme distress.’

“‘Poor woman !’ I said, ‘you are carrying a very heavy burden ; your poor naked feet are wounded-

Give me the bundle ; I will carry it to my home, and you will walk more easily.'

" 'This burden becomes heavier every day,' she replied, with a melancholy smile which made her altogether beautiful ; 'but I do not complain of it. I have carried it for several years, and I have travelled hundreds of leagues with it without regretting my trouble. I never intrust it to any one ; but you seem like such a good child that I will lend it to you for a little.'

"With this she unfastened her cloak, which covered her entirely, leaving only the handle of her guitar exposed. Then I saw a child five or six years old, pale and bronzed like her mother, but with a calm and sweet face which filled my heart with tenderness. It was a little girl in rags, thin but strong, and sleeping the sleep of the angels on the burning and wearied back of the wandering singer. I took her in my arms, but had trouble to keep her there, for when she awoke and found herself upon a stranger's breast she struggled and cried. Her mother spoke to her in her own tongue to reassure her. My caresses and care consoled her, and we were the best friends in the world when we reached the castle. When the poor woman had supped, she placed the child in a bed which had been prepared for it, made a strange sort of toilet, sadder still than her rags, and came into the room where we had dined and sang to us Spanish, French and German songs with a fine voice, a pure accent and a sincerity

of feeling which charmed us. My good aunt showed her a thousand attentions. She seemed to appreciate them, but she never laid aside her pride, and made evasive replies to our questions. Her child interested me still more than she did. I should have liked to see her again to amuse her and even to keep her. I felt a tender solicitude for this poor little being, a wanderer on the face of the earth. I dreamed of her all night, and as soon as it was day I hurried to see her. But the Zingara was already gone, and I climbed the mountain to look for her in vain. She had risen before the day and had taken the road to the south, with her child and my guitar, which I had given her, as her own was broken, to her great regret."

"Albert, Albert!" cried Consuelo, seized with extraordinary emotion, "that guitar is in Venice with my master Porpora, who is keeping it for me, and from whom I shall obtain it, never to part with it. It is of ebony with a cipher inlaid in silver, — a cipher which I recollect well, 'A. R.' My mother, whose memory failed her because she had seen too much, could not recollect either your name nor that of your castle, nor even the country in which this adventure had happened to her. But she often spoke to me of the hospitality which she had received from the owner of this guitar, and the touching charity of a young and handsome nobleman who had carried me in his arms for half a league, while he conversed with her as with an equal. Oh, dear Albert! I, too, recollect all that! With each word of your story,

these pictures which have long been slumbering in my brain awoke one by one. That is why your mountains did not seem absolutely new to my eyes, why I strove in vain to know the cause of the confused memories which the landscape aroused in me, and why, above all, I felt my heart thrill at the first sight of you, and my head bend respectfully, as if I had found again a protector long lost and regretted."

"Do you suppose, Consuelo," said Albert, pressing her against his breast, "that I did not know you at the first moment? It was in vain that you had grown, had been transformed and had become beautiful in the course of years. I have a memory (a marvellous, though sometimes baneful, gift) which has no need of eyes nor words to act through ages and days. I did not know that you were my beloved Zingarella; but I did know well that I had already met you, loved you, pressed you to my heart, which from that moment became attached to yours and identified with it, without my knowledge, for all my life."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONVERSING in this way they reached the fork of the roads where Consuelo had met Zdenko, and from afar they could perceive the light of his lantern, which he had placed upon the ground beside him. Consuelo, knowing the dangerous caprices and the great strength of the "innocent," clung involuntarily to Albert when she saw this indication of his proximity.

"Why are you afraid of this gentle and affectionate creature?" said the young count, surprised at this fright, yet pleased. "Zdenko loves you, although a bad dream which he had last night has made him disobedient to my orders, and somewhat hostile to the generous project which you had formed of coming to find me. But he is as submissive to me as a child when I insist, and if I say a word you will see him at your feet."

"Do not humiliate him before me," replied Consuelo. "Do not increase the aversion which he feels for me. When we have passed him, I will tell you what serious motives I have for fearing and avoiding him in the future."

"Zdenko is an almost celestial being," said Albert, "and I could never believe him dangerous to any one. His perpetual ecstasy gives him the purity and charity of the angels."

“This condition of ecstasy, which I admire myself, Albert, is a disease when it is prolonged. Do not deceive yourself in regard to this. God is not willing that man should abjure in this way the feeling and consciousness of his real life to exalt himself too often in vague conceits of an ideal world. Madness and fury are the results of this sort of intoxication, as a punishment for pride and indolence.”

Cynabre paused before Zdenko and looked at him affectionately, awaiting a caress which this friend did not deign to bestow upon him. His head was between his hands, and he was in the same attitude and on the same rock as when Consuelo had left him. Albert spoke to him in Bohemian, but he scarcely replied. He only shook his head with a discouraged air; his cheeks were streaming with tears, and he would not even look at Consuelo. Albert raised his voice and addressed him vigorously, but in his tone there was more exhortation and tenderness than command and reproach. Zdenko finally rose and held out his hand to Consuelo, who trembled as she shook it.

“Now,” he said in German, looking at her kindly though sadly, “you must not be afraid of me; but you pain me, and I know that your hand is full of misfortunes for us.”

He walked before them, occasionally exchanging a word with Albert. They followed the well-built and spacious gallery which Consuelo had not yet traversed on this side, and which led them to a round chamber, where they found the water from the spring flowing

into a vast basin made by the hand of man, and lined with hewn stone. It escaped from this by two currents, one of which was lost in the caverns, while the other led towards the castle cistern. It was the latter which Zdenko closed, replacing three enormous stones with his herculean hand when he wished to drain the cistern to the level of the arcade and the stairway which led to Albert's terrace.

"Let us sit down here," said the count to his companion, "and give the water of the cistern time to escape by an outlet."

"Which I know only too well," said Consuelo, shivering from head to foot.

"What do you mean?" asked Albert, looking at her with surprise.

"I will tell you by and by. I do not wish to sadden you and move you by the idea of the perils which I overcame" —

"But what does she mean?" cried Albert appalled, looking at Zdenko.

Zdenko replied in Bohemian with an expression of indifference, while he kneaded with his long brown hands lumps of clay which he placed in the interstices between the stones of his dam to hasten the emptying of the cistern.

"Explain, Consuelo," said Albert, with great agitation, "I can understand nothing from what he says. He asserts that it was not he who brought you here, that you came by passages which I know to be impassable, and where a delicate woman would never

have ventured, nor been able to find her way. He says (good God, what does he not say, the unhappy creature !) that it is fate which led you, and that the Archangel Michael, whom he calls the haughty and overbearing, led you through the waters and over the chasms."

"It is possible," replied Consuelo with a smile, "that the Archangel Michael had something to do with it, for it is certain that I came by the outlet of the fountain, that I outran the torrent, that I believed myself lost two or three times, that I passed through caverns and passages where I expected to be stifled or swallowed up at every step, and yet these dangers were not more frightful than Zdenko's anger when chance or Providence guided me into the right road."

Then Consuelo, still speaking in Spanish to Albert, detailed to him in a few words the reception which his pacific Zdenko had given her, and his attempt to bury her alive, which he had almost accomplished when she had had the presence of mind to pacify him by a strangely heretical formula. A cold sweat streamed from Albert's brow as he listened to these incredible details, and several times he cast furious glances at Zdenko, as if he would have liked to annihilate him. Zdenko met them with a curious expression of insubordination and contempt. Consuelo trembled as she saw these two madmen turn upon each other ; for in spite of the lofty wisdom and exquisite sentiments which inspired Albert's language for the most part, it was very evident to her that his reason had

received severe injuries from which it might never entirely recover. She tried to reconcile them by speaking affectionately to both of them. But Albert, rising and handing the keys of his hermitage to Zdenko, spoke a few words to him very coldly, whereupon Zdenko instantly became submissive. He took up his lantern, and went off singing incomprehensible words set to strange airs.

"Consuelo," said Albert, when he had lost sight of him, "if that faithful animal lying at your feet were to become mad, — yes, if my poor Cynabre were to endanger your life by an involuntary madness, I should have to kill him, and you may believe that I should not hesitate, although my hand has never shed blood, not even that of beings inferior to man. So you may be easy; no danger will threaten you for the future."

"What do you mean, Albert?" replied the young girl, frightened at this unexpected allusion. "I am no longer afraid. Zdenko is still a man, although he has lost his reason by his own fault, perhaps, and also a little by yours. Do not speak of blood or punishment. It is your duty to recall him to the truth and to cure his madness instead of encouraging it. Come, let us go; I tremble lest day should dawn and surprise us upon our arrival."

"You are right," said Albert, resuming his route. "Wisdom speaks by your mouth, Consuelo. My madness has been contagious for this unfortunate creature, and it was high time for you to come and raise us both from the depths in which we grovelled.

Cured by you, I will attempt to cure Zdenko. And if, nevertheless, I cannot succeed, and his madness again imperils your life, although Zdenko is a man before God, and an angel in his love for me, although he is the only friend that I have thus far had upon earth, you may be sure, Consuelo, that I will tear him from my heart, and that you will never see him again."

"Enough, enough, Albert!" murmured Consuelo, unable to support a new fright after all those which she had already undergone. "Do not even suppose such a thing. I would a thousand times rather lose my own life than impose such a necessity and such a remorse upon yours."

Albert did not hear her, and seemed lost in thought. He forgot to support her, and did not see her stumbling and fainting at every step. He was absorbed by the idea of the dangers which she had undergone for his sake, and in his terror at retracing them, in his ardent anxiety, in his exalted gratitude, he walked rapidly, filling the passage with his disconnected exclamations, and leaving her to drag herself after him with efforts which grew more and more painful.

In this cruel situation Consuelo thought of Zdenko, who was behind her and might return, and of the torrent which he held, so to speak, in the hollow of his hand, and which he could unloose as she was re-ascending the well alone and deprived of Albert's aid; for the count, under the influence of a new illusion, seemed to see her before him and was following a delusive spectre, leaving her behind in the darkness.

It was too much for a woman, even for Consuelo. Cynabre walked as swiftly as his master, and disappeared with his lantern, and Consuelo had left her own behind in the cavern. The road made frequent turns, around which the light kept vanishing at every moment. Consuelo struck against one of these angles, fell and could not rise again. The chill of death ran through her members. A last apprehension occurred swiftly to her mind. Zdenko, to conceal the staircase and the outlet by the cistern, had probably received orders to open the dam at a given time. Even if he were not inspired by hate, he would carry out this necessary precaution from habit. "It is all over!" thought Consuelo, as she made vain efforts to drag herself along upon her knees, "I am the victim of a pitiless destiny. I shall not escape from this fatal passage; my eyes will never again see the light of heaven."

Already a thicker veil than the external darkness was spreading before her eyes, her hands were becoming numb and an apathy like the last sleep was putting an end to her terror. Suddenly she felt herself seized by strong arms which lifted her and bore her away to the cistern. A warm breast beat against her own, a friendly and caressing voice spoke tender words to her. Cynabre bounded before with the lantern. It was Albert who, come to himself, was bearing her away and saving her, with the transport of a mother who had lost her child and found it again. In three minutes they arrived at the canal by which the water of the cistern had run

out, they reached the arcade and the stairway in the cistern. Cynabre, accustomed to this dangerous ascent, sprang on ahead, as if fearing to interfere with his master's steps by remaining too close to him. Albert, bearing Consuelo on one arm and grasping the chain with the other, ascended this spiral at whose bottom the water was preparing to ascend also. It was not the least of the dangers which Consuelo had undergone, but she was no longer afraid. Albert was gifted with a muscular strength in comparison with which Zdenko's was but a jest, and at this moment he was filled with a supernatural power. When he laid down his precious burden upon the margin of the well by the first light of dawn, Consuelo breathed freely at last, and tearing herself from his panting breast, wiped with her veil her broad brow, which was bathed in moisture.

"My friend," said she to him tenderly, "but for you I should have died, and you have repaid all that I have been able to do for you. But now I feel your fatigue more than you do yourself, and it seems to me that I am about to sink under it in your place."

"Oh, my little Zingarella!" said Albert, enthusiastically kissing the veil which she held to her face, "you are as light in my arms as the day I carried you down the Schreckenstein to bring you into this castle."

"Which you will not leave without my permission. Do not forget your oath, Albert!"

"Nor you yours," he replied, kneeling before her.

He assisted her to wrap herself in her veil and to pass through his room, from which she slipped furtively

to regain her own. The people in the castle were beginning to awaken. She could already hear a sharp, dry cough from the floor below, the signal that the canoness was rising. Consuelo had the good fortune not to be seen or heard by any one. Fear lent her wings to take refuge in her chamber. With trembling hands she took off her soiled and torn garments, and hid them in a trunk from which she removed the key. She retained the strength needful to cause every trace of her mysterious trip to disappear. But hardly had her weary head fallen upon her pillow, when a hot and heavy sleep, full of fantastic dreams of frightful events, came to fasten her down beneath the weight of an overwhelming and pitiless fever.

CHAPTER XVII.

MEANWHILE the Canoness Wenceslawa, after half an hour of prayer, ascended the stairs, and, according to her custom, devoted her first care for the day to her beloved nephew. She went to the door of his room and placed her ear to the keyhole, although with less hope than ever of hearing the slight noises which would proclaim his return. What were her surprise and delight when she detected the sound of his even breathing in sleep. She made a great sign of the cross, and venturing to turn the key in the lock, went in on tiptoe. She saw Albert sleeping peacefully on his bed, and Cynabre curled up on a neighboring chair. She did not awaken either of them, but hurried to find Count Christian, who, kneeling in his oratory, was praying with his wonted resignation that his son might be restored to him either in heaven or upon earth.

“Brother,” said she, in a low voice, as she knelt beside him, “suspend your prayers and seek in your heart for the most fervent thanksgivings. God has heard you.”

She did not need to speak more clearly. The old man, turning towards her, and seeing her clear little eyes filled with deep and sympathetic joy, raised his withered hands to heaven, and cried in a faint voice, —

“My God, you have restored my son to me !”

Then both, by the same inspiration, began to recite alternately in an undertone the verses of the beautiful song of Simeon, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.”

They decided not to awaken Albert. They called the baron, the chaplain and all the servants, and listened devoutly to a mass of thanksgiving in the castle chapel. Amelia learned of her cousin’s return with sincere joy, but she thought it very unjust that to celebrate piously this happy event they should compel her to rise at five o’clock in the morning and submit to a mass during which she had to stifle numberless yawns.

“Why did not your friend, the good Porporina, join with us in thanking Providence?” said Count Christian, when the mass was ended.

“I tried to wake her,” replied Amelia; “I called her, shook her and tried in every way to arouse her, but I could not make her understand, nor induce her to open her eyes. If she had not been burning and red as fire I should have thought her dead. She must have slept very badly last night and had a fever.”

“In that case she is ill, the worthy creature !” returned the old count. “My dear sister, you should go to see her, and give her the attention which her condition demands. God grant that so fair a day may not be saddened by the illness of this noble girl.”

“I will go, brother,” replied the canoness, who now never said a word nor took a step where Consuelo was

concerned without consulting the chaplain by a look ; “but do not trouble yourself, Christian, it cannot amount to much. Signora Nina is very nervous. She will soon recover. Still, is it not a very singular thing,” she said to the chaplain, a moment later, when she could take him aside, “that this child could predict Albert’s return with exactness and assurance? Perhaps we were mistaken about her, chaplain. She may be a sort of saint, who has revelations.”

“A saint would have come to hear the mass, instead of having a fever at such a moment,” objected the chaplain, with a profound air.

This judicious remark drew a sigh from the canoness. Nevertheless, she went to see Consuelo, and found her with a burning fever, accompanied by an invincible somnolency. The chaplain was called, and declared that she would be very ill if this fever continued. He questioned the young baroness, to know whether her neighbor had not had a very troubled night.

“On the contrary,” replied Amelia, “I did not hear her move. After her predictions and the fine stories which she has been telling us for several days, I expected to hear a witch’s Sabbath in her room. But the devil must have carried her far away, or else she had to do with very well-bred imps, for she never moved, so far as I know, and my sleep was not disturbed for an instant.”

This jesting appeared in very bad taste to the chaplain, and the canoness, whose heart redeemed the

errors of her mind, thought it out of place at the bedside of a companion who was severely ill. She revealed nothing of this, however, attributing her niece's bitterness to a jealousy which she believed only too well founded, and she asked the chaplain what medicine must be given to Porporina.

He prescribed a sedative, which it was impossible to make her swallow. Her teeth were clinched, and her livid lips refused all drink. The chaplain declared that this was a bad sign. But with the apathy which was unfortunately too contagious in this household, he postponed forming a judgment on the invalid until a new examination. "We will see; we must wait; we can decide nothing yet." These were the favorite sentences of the tonsured *Æsculapius*.

"If this continues," he repeated, as he left Consuelo's room, "we shall have to think of calling a physician, for I will not take upon me to treat an extreme case of brain trouble. I will pray for this young lady, and perhaps, considering the frame of mind in which she has been for these last few days, we had better look to God alone for aid more efficacious than that of science."

They left a servant with Consuelo, and went to prepare for breakfast. The canoness herself kneaded the finest cake which had ever left her skilful hands. She flattered herself that Albert, after so long a fast, would eat this favorite dish with pleasure. The handsome Amelia made a dazzling toilet, saying to herself that perhaps her cousin would feel some regret for

having offended and irritated her when he found her so attractive. Every one thought of preparing some agreeable surprise for the young count, and they forgot the only person for whom they should have cared, poor Consuelo, to whom they owed the young count's return, and whom he would be impatient to see once more.

Albert soon awoke, and instead of making useless efforts to remember the events of the day before, as always happened after the attacks of insanity which led him to his subterranean abode, he promptly recovered the recollection of his love and of the happiness which Consuelo had given him. He rose quickly, dressed and perfumed himself, and hurried to cast himself into the arms of his father and his aunt. The joy of these good relatives was raised to the highest pitch when they saw that Albert was in full possession of his reason, that he was conscious of his long absence, and that he asked their pardon for it with ardent tenderness, promising never again to cause them such pain and anxiety. He saw the transports excited by his return to a consciousness of real life ; but he noticed the precautions which they persisted in taking to conceal his position from him, and he felt a little humiliated at being still treated as a child when he felt that he had become a man again. He submitted to this punishment, too light for the ills which he had caused, saying to himself that it was a wholesome warning, and that Consuelo would approve him for understanding and accepting it.

When he sat down at table amid the caresses, the happy tears and the tender attentions of his family, he sought anxiously with his eyes for her who had become necessary to his life and his peace of mind. He saw her place empty, but did not dare to ask why Porporina did not come down. Nevertheless, the canoness, who saw him turn his head and start every time that a door was opened, thought that she ought to relieve him of all uneasiness by saying that their young guest had slept badly, that she was resting, and wished to keep her bed for part of the day.

Albert understood readily that his liberator must be overwhelmed with fatigue, but nevertheless he looked frightened at this news.

“Dear aunt,” said he, unable longer to restrain his emotion, “it seems to me that if Porpora’s adopted daughter is seriously indisposed, we ought not all to be here, quietly occupied in eating and chatting about a table.”

“Do not be uneasy, Albert,” said Amelia, blushing with annoyance. “Nina is employed in dreaming of you and prophesying your return, which she awaits in sleep, while we are joyfully celebrating it here.”

Albert turned pale with indignation, and, darting a withering glance at his cousin, said, —

“If any one here has waited for me in sleep, it is not the person whom you have named. The freshness of your cheeks, my pretty cousin, proves that you have not lost an hour of sleep in my absence, and that you have no need of rest now. I thank you for

it with all my heart, for it would be very painful for me to ask pardon of you, as I ask pardon with shame and sorrow of all the other members and friends of my family."

"A thousand thanks for the exception," returned Amelia, scarlet with rage; "I will endeavor always to deserve it by keeping my watching and my anxiety for those who will be grateful for it, and not make a jest of it."

This little altercation, which was no new thing between Albert and his cousin, although it had never been so bitter on both sides, cast a gloom and constraint over the rest of the morning, in spite of all the efforts which they made to amuse Albert. The canoness went to see her invalid several times, and always found her more burning and more exhausted. Amelia, whom Albert's anxiety wounded like a personal insult, went to weep in her own apartments. The chaplain declared himself so far as to tell the canoness that it would be necessary to send for a physician that evening if the fever did not break. Count Christian kept his son with him to distract him from an anxiety which he did not understand, and which he thought unhealthy. But while he held him at his side by affectionate words, the good old man was unable to find any subject of conversation interesting to this intelligence which he had never been willing to sound, for fear of being conquered and controlled by a reason stronger than his own in religious matters. It is very true that Count Christian characterized as foolish

and rebellious the bright light which shone amid all Albert's eccentricities, and the brilliancy of which the feeble eyes of a rigid Catholic could not endure ; but he hardened himself against the sympathy which prompted him to question him seriously. Whenever he had attempted to correct his heresies, he had been reduced to silence by arguments full of sincerity and firmness. Nature had not made him eloquent. He had not the animation which supports an argument, still less that charlatanism in discussion which, in default of logic, attempts to impose by an air of learning and by boasts of certainty. Simple and modest, he allowed himself to be silenced. He reproached himself for not having profited by the years of his youth to learn the profound matters which Albert opposed to him ; and, confident that there were treasures of truth in the depths of theological lore with which a more able and a more learned man than he could crush Albert's heresy, he clung to his shaken faith, and threw himself back upon his ignorance and his simplicity to excuse himself from more energetic action, — a course which made the rebel too proud, and thus did him more harm than good.

Their conversation, which was broken twenty times by a sort of mutual dread, and twenty times renewed with an effort by one or the other, at last died away of itself. Old Christian dozed in his arm-chair, and Albert left him to go and inquire about Consuelo's condition, which frightened him the more as they made greater efforts to conceal it from him.

He spent more than two hours wandering about the castle corridors, watching for the appearance of the canoness or the chaplain, to ask news of them. The chaplain persisted in replying to him concisely and with reserve ; the canoness put on a smiling face as soon as she saw him, and spoke to him of other matters, to deceive him by an appearance of security. But Albert saw clearly that she was beginning to be seriously anxious, and that her journeys to Consuelo's chamber were more and more frequent ; and he remarked that they were not afraid to open and close the doors incessantly, as if this sleep which they pretended was peaceful and necessary could not be disturbed by noise and bustle. He ventured to approach the chamber which he would have given his life to be able to enter for an instant. It was preceded by another room, and separated from the corridor by two thick doors which gave passage to neither sight nor sound. The canoness, who had observed this attempt, had closed and bolted every entrance, and now only visited her invalid by passing through Amelia's room, which was next Consuelo's, and where Albert would have gone to seek information only with mortal repugnance. At last, seeing him exasperated, and dreading a return of his illness, she took upon herself to lie, and, as she asked God in her heart to pardon her, announced to him that the invalid was much better, and that she hoped to come down and dine with the family.

Albert did not distrust his aunt's words, for her pure lips had never violated the truth as they had

just done, and he hastened to find the old count, speeding with all his prayers the hour which was to restore to him Consuelo and happiness.

But the hour struck in vain ; Consuelo did not appear. The canoness, making rapid progress in the art of lying, said that she had risen, but that she still felt a little weak, and had preferred to dine in her room. They even pretended to send her the most delicate portions of the dishes. These stratagems overcame Albert's fright, and although he felt an overwhelming sadness and a sort of presentiment of misfortune, he submitted, and made an effort to appear calm.

In the evening, Wenceslawa came with an air of satisfaction which was hardly assumed, to say that Porporina was better, that her complexion was not so flushed, that her pulse was weak rather than strong, and that she would certainly pass an excellent night. "Why am I frozen with terror, in spite of this good news?" thought the young count, as he bade good-night to his family at the usual hour.

The fact is, that the good canoness, who, in spite of her deformity, had never been ill a day in her life, understood nothing whatever about the illness of others. She saw Consuelo pass from a blazing red to a bluish paleness, her heated blood become fixed in her arteries, and her breast, too weak to rise under the effort of respiration, appear calm and motionless. For a moment she had thought her cured, and had announced this news with childish confidence.

But the chaplain, who had a little more knowledge, said that this apparent repose was the forerunner of a violent crisis. As soon as Albert had withdrawn, he told the canoness that the moment had come to send for a physician. Unfortunately the town was at a distance, the night dark, the roads almost impassable and Hans very slow in spite of his zeal. A storm arose, and the rain fell in torrents. The old horse which the old servant rode became frightened, stumbled repeatedly and at last went astray in the woods with his terrified rider, who took every hill for the Schreckenstein and every flash of lightning for the blazing flight of an evil spirit. It was broad day before Hans recovered his road. He hurried to the town at as swift a trot as he could get from his horse, and found the doctor in a sound sleep. The latter awoke, dressed slowly and at last set out. Four-and-twenty hours had been wasted in deciding on this and in accomplishing it.

Albert tried in vain to sleep. A devouring anxiety and the sinister sounds of the storm kept him awake all night. He did not dare to go down for fear of still further shocking his aunt, who had read him a sermon for haunting the neighborhood of the young ladies' apartment. He left his door open, and several times heard steps on the floor below. He hurried to the stairway, but as he neither saw any one nor heard anything more, he endeavored to reassure himself, and to lay the deceptive sounds which had frightened him to the charge of the wind and the

rain. Since Consuelo had exacted it of him, he cared for his reason, his mental health, with patience and firmness. He put away fear and anxiety, and endeavored to rise above his love by the strength of his love itself. But suddenly, amid the rolling of the thunder and the cracking of the ancient woodwork of the castle, which was quivering beneath the beating of the storm, a long, harrowing cry reached him, and struck him to the heart like the stab of a dagger. Albert, who had thrown himself fully dressed upon his bed, with the resolution of going to sleep, bounded up, and springing out of his room and down the stairs like a flash, knocked at Consuelo's door. All had become silent again, and no one came to open it. Albert thought that he had been dreaming, but a second cry more frightful, more mournful than the first, struck upon his ear. He did not hesitate, but made a detour through a dark corridor to Amelia's door, which he shook as he called out his name. He heard a bolt shot and Amelia's voice commanding him imperiously to go away. But still the cries and moans redoubled ; it was the voice of Consuelo, suffering intolerable agony. He heard his own name uttered with despair by that adored mouth. He burst in the door furiously, in spite of lock and bolt, and thrusting aside Amelia, who affected outraged modesty when she found herself surprised in a damask dressing-gown and lace cap, he threw her on her sofa, and rushed into Consuelo's room, pale as a ghost and with his hair erect upon his head.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONSUELO, who was under the influence of a frightful delirium, was struggling in the arms of two of the strongest maids in the house, who had great difficulty in preventing her from throwing herself out of bed. Tormented by unheard-of terrors, as happens in certain cases of brain fever, the unhappy child wished to fly from the visions which assailed her. She thought she saw in the persons who were attempting to restrain and calm her enemies and monsters determined on her destruction. The appalled chaplain, who expected to see her fall back, stricken dead by her attack, was already repeating beside her the prayers for the dying. She took him for Zdenko, building, as he hummed his mysterious songs, the wall which was to bury her. The trembling canoness, who joined her feeble efforts to those of the other women to hold her in her bed, appeared to her as the phantom of the two Wandas, Ziska's sister and Albert's mother, appearing by turns in the grotto and reproaching her for usurping their rights and invading their domains. Her exclamations, moans and delirious prayers, inexplicable to those present, had a direct connection with the thoughts and objects which had so strongly impressed and agitated her the night before. She heard the noise of the torrent, and with her arms imitated the motion of swim-

ming. She shook her black hair, spreading over her shoulders, and thought she saw flecks of foam fall from it. She believed Zdenko continually behind her, busied in opening the flood-gates, or before her, eager to bar her road. She spoke only of water and stones, with a continuity of figures which caused the chaplain to say, as he shook his head, "This is a very long and very painful dream. I do not know why she has been so much concerned about this cistern recently; no doubt it was a commencement of her fever, and you see that her delirium has always that object in view."

At the moment when Albert distractedly entered her room, Consuelo, exhausted by fatigue, was only giving utterance to inarticulate words which ended in wild screams. The power of her will no longer governing her terrors, as at the moment when she braved them, they were exerting upon her a retroactive effect of terrible intensity. Nevertheless, she recovered a kind of consciousness drawn from her delirium itself, and began to call Albert with so full and vibrant a voice that it seemed as if the whole house must shake on its foundations because of it. Then her cries died away into long sobs, which seemed to suffocate her, although her eyes remained dry and frightfully brilliant.

"Here I am! here I am!" cried Albert, as he rushed towards her bed.

Consuelo heard him, recovered all her energy, and then, imagining that he was fleeing from her, freed herself from the grasp of those who held her with that rapidity of movement and muscular force which the

delirium of fever gives to the weakest beings. She sprang into the middle of the room with her hair in disorder, her feet bare and her body clothed with a white night-dress, thin and rumpled, which gave her the appearance of a spectre escaped from the tomb. Just as they thought they were about to seize her, she sprang with the activity of a frightened cat over the spinet which lay in her way, reached the window, which she took for the opening of the fatal cistern, stepped upon the sill, stretched out her arms, and again calling out Albert's name amid the darkness and storm of the night, was about to cast herself down when Albert, still swifter and stronger than she, caught her in his arms and carried her back to her bed. She did not recognize him, but she made no resistance and ceased crying out. Albert showered upon her in Spanish the tenderest names and the most fervent prayers, and she listened to him with her eyes fixed, without hearing or answering him. But suddenly, rising and falling upon her knees in her bed, she began to sing a verse of Handel's *Te Deum*, which she had recently read and admired. Never had her voice had more brilliancy or more expression. Never had she been so beautiful as in this ecstatic attitude with her hair falling about her, her cheeks burning with the fire of fever and eyes which seemed to read the heavens, opened to her alone. The canoness was so moved that she knelt at the foot of the bed and burst into tears, and the chaplain, in spite of his lack of sympathy, bowed his head and was filled with re-

ligious awe. Consuelo had scarcely ended her verse when she heaved a heavy sigh and a divine joy shone upon her face.

"I am saved!" she cried, and she fell back, pale and cold as marble, with eyes still open, but dim, and with pale lips and stiffened arms.

A moment of silence and stupor followed this scene. Amelia, who had watched the frightful spectacle, silent and motionless on the threshold of her room, without daring to take a step, fell fainting from horror. The canoness and the two women ran to care for her. Consuelo remained still and livid, stretched upon the arm of Albert, who had allowed his head to fall upon the breast of the dying woman, and appeared to be no more alive than she. The canoness returned to the threshold of Consuelo's room as soon as she had seen Amelia placed upon her bed.

"Well, chaplain?" said she, with a look of despair.

"Madam, it is death!" replied the chaplain, as he dropped Consuelo's arm, the pulse in which he had been attentively feeling.

"No, it is not death! no, a thousand times no!" cried Albert, as he raised himself impetuously. "I have consulted her heart better than you her arm. It still beats; she breathes, she lives, she will live. It is not thus, it is not now, that she is to die. Who has had the boldness to believe that God had decreed her death? Now is the time to treat her efficaciously. Give me your medicine-chest, chaplain. I know what is necessary and you do not. Wretched man, obey

me ! You did not help her ; you did not prevent this horrible attack ; you did not wish to. You concealed her illness from me ; you have all deceived me ! Did you wish to kill her ? Your cowardly prudence, your hideous apathy, have tied your tongue and your hands ! Give me your chest, I say, and let me act ! ”

And as the chaplain hesitated to give him these medicines which might become poisons in the hands of an excited and half-mad man, he snatched them from him violently. Deaf to the remonstrances of his aunt, he chose and mixed himself the powerful sedatives which could act promptly. Albert was more learned in many things than they supposed. He had studied the effects of the most violent revulsives upon himself at a period of his life when he was still conscious of the frequent disorders of his brain. Inspired by a prompt judgment and a courageous and absolute zeal, he administered a dose which the chaplain would never have ventured to advise. He succeeded with incredible patience and gentleness in opening the invalid's teeth and in making her swallow some drops of this powerful remedy. At the end of an hour, during which he repeated the treatment several times, Consuelo breathed freely. Her hands had recovered warmth and her features were less rigid. She neither heard nor felt anything as yet ; but her exhaustion became a kind of sleep, and a faint color returned to her lips. The physician arrived and, seeing that the case was serious, declared that they had called him very late and that he would answer for

nothing. He would have bled her the day before, but now the time was not favorable. The bleeding would bring on another paroxysm, which was embarrassing.

"It will bring it on," said Albert, "and yet you must bleed her."

The German physician, a heavy personage, full of self-conceit and accustomed to being looked upon as an oracle in his neighborhood, where he had no rival, raised his thick eyelids and looked scornfully at the person who ventured to judge so decidedly.

"I tell you that you must bleed!" repeated Albert energetically. "The paroxysm will return, with or without the bleeding."

"Pardon me; that is not so certain as you seem to think," replied Dr. Wetzeliu, as he smiled somewhat contemptuously and ironically.

"If the paroxysm does not return," retorted Albert, "all is lost; you must know that. This somnolency leads straight to the benumbing of the faculties of the brain, to paralysis and to death. Your duty is to control the disease and to revive its intensity so as to combat it. If not, what are you here for? Prayers and burials are not your business. Bleed, or I will bleed myself!"

The doctor knew perfectly well that Albert's reasoning was sound, and he had from the first intended to bleed; but it did not beseem a man of his importance to decide and act so quickly. It would have caused them to think that the case was simple and the treat-

ment easy, and our German was accustomed to feign great perplexity and a laborious examination, so as to come out of it triumphantly, as if by a sudden illumination of his genius, and to have people repeat what he had heard a thousand times, "The disease was so far advanced and dangerous that Dr. Wetzelius himself hardly knew what to do. No one but he could have chosen the right moment or thought of the right medicine. He is a very prudent, learned and wise man. He has not his equal, even in Vienna."

When he found himself contradicted and brought to bay by Albert's impatience, he replied, —

"If you are a physician, and if you are in charge here, I do not see why I was sent for and I will go home again."

"If you will not decide to act at the proper time, you may retire," said Albert.

Dr. Wetzelius, profoundly hurt at having been associated with an unknown physician who treated him with so little deference, rose and passed into Amelia's room to look after the nerves of that young person, who was calling for him urgently, and to take leave of the canoness. But the good woman restrained him.

"Alas, my dear doctor!" said she, "you surely cannot abandon us in such a situation. You see what a responsibility is weighing on us. My nephew has offended you, but ought you to think seriously of the excitement of one who is so little master of himself?"

"Is it Count Albert?" asked the doctor amazed. "I should never have known him, he is so changed!"

“Undoubtedly ; during the ten years since you last saw him, he has changed greatly.”

“I thought him entirely recovered,” said the doctor maliciously, “for I have not been sent for once since his return.”

“Ah, my dear doctor, you know that Albert has never been willing to submit to the decrees of science ! ”

“And yet he is a physician himself, I see.”

“He has some notions of everything, but he displays his rash haste at all times. The frightful state in which he has just seen this young girl has disturbed him greatly ; otherwise you would have found him more polite, more sensible and more grateful for the care which you bestowed upon him in his childhood.”

“I am afraid that he is more in need of it than ever,” replied the doctor, who, in spite of his respect for the family and the castle, preferred to afflict the canoness by this cruel remark rather than to lay aside his contemptuous attitude and sacrifice the petty vengeance of treating Albert as a lunatic.

The canoness suffered from this cruelty, and all the more because the doctor’s anger might cause him to betray her nephew’s condition, which she took so much pains to conceal. She became humble to disarm him, and asked him meekly what he thought of this bleeding which Albert advised.

“I think that it would be absurd at present,” said the doctor, who wished to take the initiative and let fall the decision freely from his own respectable

mouth. "I will wait an hour or two. I will not lose sight of the patient, and if the right moment occurs sooner than I now think, I will act ; but at this crisis the condition of the pulse will not allow me to decide."

"Then you will stay with us? God bless you, excellent doctor ! "

"So long as my adversary is the young count," said the doctor, smiling with an air of protecting pity, "I am surprised at nothing and do not mind what he says."

He was about to reënter Consuelo's room, the door of which the chaplain had closed that Albert might not hear this conversation, when the chaplain himself, pale and terrified, left the invalid and came to find the doctor.

"In the name of heaven, doctor," he cried, "come and assert your authority ! Mine is despised, and I believe that Count Albert would disregard even the voice of God. He is determined to bleed the dying woman in spite of your prohibition, and he will do it, if we do not succeed in stopping him by force or address. God knows whether he has ever touched a lancet. He will mangle her, if he does not kill her on the spot by an ill-timed bleeding ! "

"Indeed ! " said the doctor, with a mocking look and walking heavily towards the door with the selfish and insulting levity of a man without heart ; "we shall have a fine time of it if I cannot bring him to reason."

But when he came to the bed, Albert had his bloody lancet between his teeth ; he was supporting Consuelo's arm with one hand and holding the basin in the other. The vein was open and black blood was flowing abundantly.

The chaplain wished to murmur, to remonstrate, to call heaven to witness. The doctor tried to jest and to distract Albert, expecting to find an occasion to close the vein and open it a little later, when his vanity might lay claim to the success. But Albert held him at a distance by the mere expression of his eye, and when he had drawn the desired quantity of blood he applied the bandage with all the skill of a practised operator. Then he gently folded Consuelo's arm beneath the bedclothes, and handing the can-
oness a phial which she was to hold to the patient's nostrils, he called the chaplain and the doctor into Amelia's chamber.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you can be of no use to the person whom I am attending. Irresolution or prejudice paralyzes your zeal and your learning. I declare to you that I take the whole responsibility, and that I wish to be neither disturbed nor interfered with in the accomplishment of so serious an undertaking. I therefore beg the chaplain to recite his prayers and the doctor to administer his potions to my cousin. I will no longer allow prophecies and preparations of death to be made by the bedside of a person who will soon recover consciousness. I wish this distinctly understood. If I am offending a learned

•

man and wounding a friend, I will ask pardon for it when I have time to think of myself."

After saying this in a tone whose calmness and sweetness contrasted with the sharpness of his words, Albert returned to Consuelo's apartment, closed the door, put the key in his pocket and said to the canoness, "No one will come in here, and no one will go out, without my consent."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE canoness, abashed, did not dare to answer him a word. There was something so peremptory in his look and manner that the good aunt was frightened, and began to obey with unexampled zeal and promptitude. The physician, seeing his authority utterly scorned, and not caring, as he afterwards said, to begin a contest with a madman, took the wise resolution to depart. The chaplain went to say his prayers, and Albert, aided by his aunt and the two maids, spent the entire day beside the patient without suspending his efforts for a moment. After some hours of quiet, the paroxysm of excitement returned, almost as severe as the night before ; but it did not last so long, and when it had yielded to the effect of powerful restoratives, Albert urged the canoness to go to bed, only sending him another woman to assist him while the first two rested.

"Will you not go to rest also, Albert?" asked Wenceslawwa timidly.

"No, dear aunt," he replied, "I have no need of it."

"Alas !" she said, "you will kill yourself, my child ! This is a stranger who costs us very dear," she added, as she went off, emboldened by the young count's inattention.

He consented, however, to take some food, that he might not lose the strength which he felt that he would need. He ate standing in the corridor with his eyes fixed on the door, and as soon as he had finished, threw down his napkin and went in again. He had already closed the communication between the rooms of Consuelo and Amelia, and only allowed access through the corridor to the few persons whom he permitted to enter. Amelia, however, wished to be admitted, and pretended to bestow some care upon her companion; but she was so awkward, and at each of Consuelo's feverish starts she showed such a dread of seeing her again fall into convulsions, that Albert, impatient, begged her not to trouble herself, but to return to her room and attend to her own affairs.

"To my room!" replied Amelia; "even if propriety did not forbid my sleeping there when you are separated from me only by a single door, almost in my room itself, do you suppose I could enjoy a very peaceful rest with these frightful cries and this horrible agony in my ears?"

Albert shrugged his shoulders and replied that there were plenty of other apartments in the castle, and that she might take possession of the best of them until the invalid could be removed into a room where her neighborhood would not disturb any one.

Amelia, full of irritation, followed this advice. The sight of the delicate and, as it were, maternal care

which Albert bestowed upon her rival was more intolerable to her than all else. "Ah, aunt!" said she, throwing herself into the canoness's arms, when the good woman had installed her in her own room, where she had a bed placed beside her own, "we have never known Albert. He is showing us now how he can love."

Consuelo hovered between life and death for several days, but Albert fought the disease with a perseverance and skill which were sure to triumph. At last he brought her safely through her severe trial, and as soon as she was out of danger had her removed to one of the towers of the castle where the sun shone longer, and from which the view was more extended and beautiful. This apartment, furnished in an antique fashion, was also more in harmony with Consuelo's serious taste than that which had at first been prepared for her, and she had already shown a desire to inhabit it. There she was safe from the importunities of her companion, and in spite of the continual presence of women who relieved each other morning and night, she was able to pass the languid and peaceful days of her convalescence in a sort of tete-a-tete with her preserver. They always spoke Spanish together, and the delicate and tender expression of Albert's passion was sweeter to her ear in that language, which recalled to Consuelo her country, her childhood and her mother. Filled with a lively gratitude, weakened by sufferings in which Albert alone had efficiently supported and cared for her, she aban-

doned herself to the soft, dreamy lassitude which follows great illness. Her memory revived by degrees, but beneath a veil which was not equally dense in all parts. If, for instance, she recalled with pure and legitimate pleasure Albert's care and devotion in the principal events of their intimacy, it was only through a cloud that she saw the disturbance of his reason, and the too serious character of his love for her. There were even moments when, in the heaviness which follows sleep or under the influence of soporific potions, she imagined that she had dreamed all that could mingle distrust or dread with her memories of this generous friend. She was so accustomed to his presence and his care, that when he was absent at her request to take his meals with his family, she felt ill and nervous until his return. She fancied that the sedatives which he prescribed had a contrary effect if he did not prepare and administer them with his own hands ; and when he handed them to her himself, she would say to him with that slow and serious smile, so touching on a handsome face, still half enveloped in the shadows of death, —

“I really believe now, Albert, that you know the art of the enchanter ; for you have only to order a drop of water to be beneficial to me and it instantly fills me with the calmness and strength which you possess yourself.”

Albert was happy for the first time in his life ; and, as if his soul had been as strong for joy as it had been for sorrow, he was the most fortunate man upon

earth at that moment of rapture and intoxication. This chamber, in which he saw his beloved at all hours and without obtrusive witnesses, had become a heaven to him. At night, as soon as he had prepared to retire, and every one in the house was in bed, he would go back to it with stealthy steps, and while the nurse who should have watched was sleeping heavily, he would glide behind the bed of his dear Consuelo, and gaze at her slumbering, pale and drooping like a flower after a storm. He would take his place in a large arm-chair which he always took care to leave beside the bed when he went away, and he would pass the entire night there, sleeping so lightly that at the slightest movement of the invalid he was bending over her to hear the feeble words which she murmured, or else his hand was ready to receive the hand which sought it when Consuelo, agitated by some dream, displayed a trace of disquiet. If the nurse awoke, Albert always told her that he had just come in, and she became convinced that he made one or two visits each night to his patient, while, in fact, he did not pass a half-hour in his own room. Consuelo shared in this illusion. Although she was conscious of Albert's presence far oftener than the nurse, she was still so weak that she easily allowed herself to be deceived by him concerning the frequency or the duration of his visits. Sometimes in the middle of the night, when she begged him to go to bed, he would tell her that day was near breaking, and that he had just risen. Thanks to these

delicate deceptions, Consuelo never suffered from his absence, and yet was not anxious about the fatigue which he must feel.

This fatigue was, in spite of everything, so slight that Albert did not perceive it. Love gives strength to the weakest, and besides the fact that Albert had an exceptionally strong constitution, never had a larger or more vivifying love dwelt in a human breast than now in his. When, at the first rays of the sun, Consuelo had dragged herself slowly to her sofa beside the open window, Albert would come and sit down beside her, and attempt, from the course of the clouds or the purple of the sunlight, to understand the nature of the thoughts which the appearance of the sky would suggest to his silent friend. Sometimes he would furtively take an end of the veil which enveloped her head, and which a balmy breeze blew over the back of the sofa, and bending his head as if to rest, would press his lips to it. One day Consuelo, on withdrawing it to fold it over her breast, was surprised to find it warm and moist, and turning about more swiftly than was her wont since the exhaustion of her illness, detected an extraordinary emotion on her friend's face. His cheeks were flushed, a devouring flame burned in his eyes, and his breast was heaving violently. Albert quickly controlled his agitation, but he had seen fright depicted upon Consuelo's countenance. This fact afflicted him deeply. He would have preferred to see her armed with disdain and haughtiness, rather than beset with fear and dis-

trust. He resolved to watch himself so carefully that no recollection of his delirium should return to alarm her whom he had cured at the risk and almost at the cost of his own life and reason.

He succeeded in this, thanks to a power which would not have belonged to a man with a calmer mind. Long since accustomed to restrain the impetuosity of his emotions, and to exercise a strength of will all the greater because it was often combated by the mysterious attacks of his disease, he exerted a self-control for which they did not give him sufficient credit. They were ignorant of the frequency of the attacks which he was able to overcome day by day, until the moment when, conquered by the violence of despair and derangement, he fled to his unknown cavern, a victor still, since he had enough self-respect to hide the spectacle of his weakness from every eye. Albert was a lunatic of the least repulsive and most unfortunate class. He was conscious of his madness, and felt it coming on until it had taken entire possession of him. And he still preserved, in the height of his attacks, a vague instinct and recollection of a real world, in which he did not wish to appear so long as he did not feel himself entirely in harmony with it. We all have this recollection of a real and positive life when painful dreams bear us into a world of fiction and delirium. We sometimes struggle against these nocturnal terrors and chimeras, saying to ourselves that they are the result of nightmare, and endeavoring to awake; but a hostile power seems

repeatedly to seize us, and plunge us into this horrible lethargy where yet more horrible spectacles and more poignant sufferings beset and torture us.

In an alternation analogous to this flowed on the powerful yet miserable life of this misunderstood man, whom nothing but an active, delicate and intelligent tenderness could save from his own distresses. This tenderness had at last appeared in his existence. Consuelo had truly the pure soul which seemed formed to find access to this gloomy spirit, heretofore shut off from all complete sympathy. In the solicitude which a romantic enthusiasm had at first aroused in this young girl, and in the respectful sympathy which gratitude had inspired since her illness, there was something sweet and touching which God, no doubt, knew to be peculiarly efficacious for Albert's cure. It is very probable that if Consuelo, forgetting the past, had shared the warmth of his passion, transports so new to his life and a joy so sudden would have excited him most disastrously. The moderate and chaste friendship which she felt for him would have a slower but a surer effect upon his welfare. It was a restraint as well as a benefit ; and if there was an intoxication in the revived heart of this young man, he mingled with it an idea of duty and sacrifice which gave other food to his thoughts and another object to his will than those which had heretofore consumed him. He consequently felt simultaneously the happiness of being loved as he had never been before, the grief of not being loved with the passion which

he felt himself, and the fear of losing this happiness by not appearing satisfied with it. This triple effect of his love soon filled his mind so completely that there was no room for the reveries to which he had been so long driven by his idleness and solitude. He was freed from them as if by enchantment ; for he forgot them, and the picture of her whom he loved kept his ills at a distance and seemed to be placed between him and them like a heavenly buckler.

The repose of mind and the calmness of feeling which were necessary to the restoration of the young invalid were consequently very rarely and very lightly disturbed by the secret agitation of her physician. He in turn strove to deliver her from the mournful thoughts which pursued her, and he succeeded by dint of delicate attentions and passionate respect. They began a new life together, leaning one upon the other, scarcely daring to look behind, and not feeling the strength to measure with their thoughts the depths which they had traversed together. The future was another abyss, no less terrible and dangerous, which they did not dare to explore. But they could peacefully enjoy the present, as a respite accorded them by Heaven.

CHAPTER XX.

THE other inhabitants of the castle were far from being so tranquil. Amelia was furious, and no longer condescended to visit the invalid. She affected not to speak to Albert, never to turn her eyes towards him, and not even to reply to his morning and evening greeting. What was most exasperating about it all was, that Albert never appeared to pay the least attention to her ill-temper.

The canoness, seeing the evident and almost publicly declared passion of her nephew for the "adventuress," no longer knew a moment's rest. She cudgelled her brains to think of a way to put an end to the danger and the scandal, and had long conversations with the chaplain on the subject. But the latter was not very anxious that such a state of affairs should cease. He had long remained useless and unnoticed amid the anxieties of the family. His role became more important with these new troubles, and he could at last give himself up to the pleasure of spying, revealing, warning, predicting and counselling; he could, in short, work at his will upon the family interests, while he appeared not to interfere, and placed himself out of reach of the young count's indignation behind the petticoats of the old aunt. Between them, they found unceasingly new causes for alarm, new motives for

precaution and no means of safety. Every day the good Wenceslawa would approach her nephew with a decisive explanation on the end of her tongue, and every day a mocking smile or an icy glance would silence the words and cause the project to miscarry. She was incessantly watching for an occasion to slip in to Consuelo and reprimand her adroitly but firmly ; but Albert, as if warned by a familiar spirit, would always appear on the threshold of the door, and by a simple frown, like the Olympian Jupiter, would quiet the anger and chill the courage of the divinities hostile to his dear Ilion. The canoness had, nevertheless, several times begun this conversation with the invalid, and as the moments were few when she could see her alone, she had profited by these occasions to address to her singular remarks which she considered extremely significant. But Consuelo was so far removed from the ambition of which they accused her, that she did not understand them. Her astonishment and her air of candor and confidence instantly disarmed the good canoness, who had never in her life been able to resist a tone of frankness or a cordial caress. She would go away quite confused to acknowledge her defeat to the chaplain, and the rest of the day would be passed in making resolutions for the morrow. But Albert, who guessed this design, and saw that Consuelo was beginning to be astonished and disturbed, resolved to put an end to it. He watched one day for Wenceslawa's appearance, and just when she expected to elude his watchfulness by surprising Con-

suelo alone early in the morning, he appeared suddenly as she was putting her hand on the key to enter the invalid's room.

"My good aunt," said he, taking this hand and raising it to his lips, "I have to whisper something to you which will interest you. It is that the life and the health of the person who is reposing there are more precious to me than my own life and my own happiness. I know very well that your confessor makes it a matter of conscience for you to thwart my devotion to her, and to destroy the effects of my care. But for that, your noble heart would never have conceived the idea of endangering by bitter words and unjust reproaches the recovery of an invalid scarcely out of danger. But since the fanaticism or the narrowness of a priest can perform such a prodigy as to transform the sincerest piety and the purest charity into blind cruelty, I will oppose with all my might the crime of which my poor aunt consents to be the instrument. I will watch my patient night and day, and never leave her for an instant ; and if, in spite of my efforts, they succeed in taking her away from me, I swear by all that is most awful in human belief that I will go out of the house of my fathers and never return to it. I think that when you have explained my determination to the chaplain, he will cease to torment you and to combat the generous instincts of your maternal heart."

The canoness was astounded, and could only reply by a burst of tears. Albert had led her to the end of the corridor, that Consuelo might not hear this expla-

nation. Wenceslawa complained bitterly of the tone of revolt and menace which her nephew had assumed towards her, and wished to profit by the occasion to show him the folly of his attachment to a person of such low extraction as Nina.

"Dear aunt," replied Albert with a smile, "you forget that though we are descended from the royal blood of the Podiebrads, our ancestors were monarchs only by the grace of revolted peasants and soldiers of fortune. A Podiebrad, therefore, should see in his glorious origin only one motive more for drawing closer to the weak and the poor, since it is there that our fortune and our power struck root, not so long ago that we can have forgotten it already."

When Wenceslawa repeated this stormy conversation to the chaplain, he thought it best not to exasperate the young count by importuning him, or to drive him into open rebellion by annoying his protege.

"You must speak to Count Christian himself," said he. "The excess of your affection has emboldened the son; let the wisdom of your remonstrances at least awaken the anxiety of the father, that he may take decisive measures in regard to this dangerous person."

"Do you not suppose," replied the canoness, "that I have already thought of this method? But, alas! my brother has aged fifteen years during the fifteen days of Albert's last disappearance. His intellect has become so clouded that it is impossible

to make him understand anything upon a hint. He seems to make a blind and mute resistance to the idea of a new sorrow. He is as pleased as a child at having recovered his son, and at hearing him converse like an apparently reasonable being. He thinks that he is radically cured, and does not perceive that poor Albert is the victim of a new sort of madness, more dreadful than the other. My brother's security in this respect is so deep, and he is so innocently happy in it, that I have not yet had the courage to destroy it by opening his eyes to what is going on. It seems to me that if this revelation came from you, he would listen to it with more resignation, and that it would be more efficacious and less painful if accompanied by your religious exhortations."

"Such a revelation is too delicate," replied the chaplain, "to be undertaken by a poor priest like me. It will be far better placed in the mouth of a sister, and your ladyship will be able to soften its bitterness by an affection which I could never permit myself to express familiarly to the august head of the family."

These two grave personages wasted several days in deciding which should bell the cat ; and during their irresolution, for which the slowness and apathy of their habits were partly responsible, love made rapid progress in Albert's heart. Consuelo's health improved visibly, and nothing occurred to disturb the sweetness of an intimacy which the watchfulness of the strictest duenna could not have made more chaste

and more reserved than it was from the simple effect of a true modesty and a profound love.

Meanwhile the Baroness Amelia, unable to endure the humiliation of her position, earnestly implored her father to take her back to Prague. Baron Frederick, who preferred life in a forest to life in a town, promised whatever she asked, but always postponed until the morrow the announcement of his departure and the preparations for it. The young girl saw that she must bring matters to a crisis, and thought of an original expedient. She arranged with her maid, an adroit and energetic young French girl; and one morning, as her father was setting out for the chase, she begged him to take her in the carriage to the castle of a lady of their acquaintance to whom she had long been owing a visit. The baron was somewhat loath to lay aside his gun and game-bag and change both his dress and the occupation of his day, but he flattered himself that this act of good nature would make Amelia less exacting; that the distraction of the ride would drive away her bad humor, and help her to pass a few days more without murmuring at the Castle of the Giants. When the good man had a week before him, he thought that he had assured independence for his lifetime; his foresight did not reach farther than that. He therefore consented to send Saphyr and Panther back to the kennel, and Attila, the falcon, returned to his perch with a rebellious and dissatisfied air which drew a great sigh from his master's breast.

At last the baron entered the carriage with his daughter, and before the wheel had made three turns went sound asleep, as was his custom under such circumstances. The coachman instantly received orders from Amelia to turn round and proceed to the nearest posting-station. They reached it after a rapid drive of two hours, and when the baron opened his eyes, he saw post-horses hitched to the pole, ready to bear him away on the road to Prague.

“Well, what is this! Where are we? Where are we going? Amelia, my dear child, what are you thinking of? What is the meaning of this caprice or pleasantry?”

The young baroness replied to all her father’s questions only by bursts of laughter or childish caresses. At last, when she saw the postilion in the saddle and the carriage rolling swiftly along the highway, she took on a serious air and spoke as follows, in a very decided tone : —

“Dear papa, do not be concerned about anything. All our baggage has been carefully packed. The boxes of the carriage are filled with the articles necessary for the journey. There is nothing left at the Castle of the Giants except your arms and your animals, for which you have no use at Prague. Besides, they will be sent to you when you ask for them. A letter will be handed to my Uncle Christian at his breakfast time. It is couched in such terms as will make him understand the necessity of our departure without paining him too much, and without making him angry with

either you or me. Now I beg your pardon for having deceived you ; but it is nearly a month since you consented to what I am at present carrying out. Therefore I am not acting against your will in returning to Prague at a moment when you did not exactly expect it, but are enchanted, I will wager, at being delivered from all the annoyances of a separation and a leave-taking. My position had become intolerable, and you did not perceive it. That is my excuse and my justification. Now, pray condescend to kiss me, and not look at me with those angry eyes, which terrify me."

While she said this, Amelia, as well as her attendant, was stifling a strong desire to laugh, for never had the baron had an angry look for any one, least of all for his beloved daughter. His great eyes were rolling from amazement just then, and it must be confessed he looked a little stupid from surprise. If he felt any annoyance at being deceived in such a way, and a real grief at leaving his brother and sister so abruptly, without saying farewell to them, he was so astounded at what had happened that his discontent turned to admiration, and he could only say, —

"But how did you manage all this without my having the least suspicion? Little did I think, by Jove ! when I took off my boots and sent my horse to the stable, that I was setting out for Prague, and that I should not dine with my brother this evening ! It is a singular adventure, and nobody will believe me when I tell it. But where have you put my travelling-

cap, Amelia, and how do you expect me to sleep in the carriage with this laced hat on my head?"

"Your cap? Here it is, dear papa," said the waggish young creature, as she handed him his fur cap, which he instantly placed upon his head with childish satisfaction.

"But my travelling-bottle? You have certainly forgotten that, you naughty little girl."

"Oh, certainly not!" she replied, as she handed him a large cut-glass bottle, covered with Russia leather and silver mounted; "I filled it myself with the best Hungarian wine in my aunt's cellar. Taste it; it is that which you prefer."

"And my pipe? And my bag of Turkish tobacco?"

"Nothing is lacking," said the maid. "The baron will find everything in the pockets of the carriage; we have forgotten nothing and neglected nothing to make the journey pleasant."

"Good!" said the baron, filling his pipe. "All the same, what you have done is very wrong, my dear Amelia. You are making me ridiculous, and you will cause everybody to laugh at me."

"Dear papa," replied Amelia, "it is I who am ridiculous in the eyes of the world when I appear obstinately bent on marrying an amiable cousin who does not condescend to look at me, and is making desperate love to my music-teacher under my very eyes. I have borne this humiliation long enough, and I doubt if there are many girls of my rank, my looks

and my age who would not have been seriously angry. What I do know very well is, that there are girls who are less bored than I have been for eighteen months who run away or get themselves carried off. I am satisfied with running away with my father. It is more novel and more respectable ; what do you think, dear papa ? ”

“ You are a little devil ! ” replied the baron, as he kissed his daughter ; and he made the remainder of the journey very gayly, drinking, smoking and sleeping by turns, without complaining and without being further astonished.

This event did not produce so much effect in the family as the little baroness had flattered herself it would. To begin with Count Albert, he might have passed a week without noticing it, and when the canoness told him of it he simply replied, —

“ That is the only clever thing the clever Amelia has done since she set foot here. As for my good uncle, I hope it will not be long before he comes back to us.”

“ I regret my brother’s departure,” said old Christian, “ because at my age we count by weeks and days. What does not seem long to you, Albert, may appear an eternity to me, and I am not so sure as you of again seeing my peaceful and careless Frederick. Well, it was Amelia’s doing,” he added, as he folded up and threw aside the singularly cajoling and mischievous letter that the young baroness had left for him ; “ a woman scorned, — you know the

rest. You were not made for each other, my children, and my fair dreams are flown away."

As he said this, the old count looked at his son with a kind of melancholy playfulness, as if to surprise some trace of regret in his eyes. But he found none, and Albert, as he pressed his arm tenderly, gave him to understand that he thanked him for renouncing a project so contrary to his inclination.

"My God, Thy will be done!" went on the old man, "and let your heart be free, my son. You are well, you appear calm and happy among us now. I shall die consoled, and the gratitude of your father will bring you happiness after our separation."

"Do not speak of separation, father!" cried the young count, whose eyes suddenly filled with tears. "I have not strength to bear the thought of it."

The canoness, who began to be moved, was spurred on at that moment by a look from the chaplain, who arose and went out of the drawing-room with an affectation of discreteness. It was an order and a signal for her. She thought, not without pain and fright, that the moment had come for speaking, and closing her eyes like a person who jumps out of a window to escape from a fire, she began, stammering and becoming more pale than usual: —

"Certainly Albert loves his father tenderly, and would not like to cause him a mortal grief" —

Albert raised his head and looked at his aunt with such clear and penetrating eyes that she was quite disconcerted, and could say no more. The old count

appeared not to have heard this strange reflection, and in the silence which followed, poor Wenceslawa remained trembling beneath her nephew's look, like a partridge pointed by a dog, which fascinates it and holds it motionless.

But Count Christian, coming out of his reverie in a few moments, replied to his sister as if she had continued to speak, or as if he could read in her heart the revelations which she wished to make to him.

"Dear sister," said he, "if I have one piece of advice to give to you, it is not to disturb yourself about things which you do not understand. You never in your life knew what an inclination of the heart was, and the austerity of a canoness is not a rule which suits a young man."

"Living God!" murmured the canoness aghast; "either my brother will not understand, or his reason and his piety are abandoning him. Can it be possible that he would encourage by his weakness, or look lightly on"—

"What, aunt?" said Albert, in a firm voice and with a severe expression. "Speak, since you are condemned to do it. State your idea clearly. This constraint must end, and we must understand each other."

"No, sister, do not speak," replied Count Christian; "you have nothing new to tell me. I have understood you perfectly for a long while without appearing to. The time has not come for an explanation on

this subject ; when it has come, I know what I shall have to do."

He immediately changed the subject, leaving the canoness in consternation and Albert uncertain and troubled.

When the chaplain knew how the head of the family had received the indirect warning which he had sent him, he was filled with dread. Count Christian, in spite of an air of indolence and irresolution, had never been a weak man. Sometimes he had been observed to abandon his somnolency for acts of wisdom and energy. The priest was afraid of having gone too far, and of being reprimanded. He strove to undo his work as quickly as possible, and to persuade the canoness not to meddle farther. A fortnight passed in the most peaceful manner, without anything happening to show Consuelo that she was a cause of trouble in the house. Albert continued his devoted care of her, and announced Amelia's departure as a temporary absence, without allowing her to suspect its motive. She began to leave her chamber, and the first time that she walked in the garden, old Christian supported with his weak and trembling arm the tottering steps of the convalescent.

CHAPTER XXI.

THAT was a fair day for Albert upon which he saw his Consuelo return to life, leaning upon his old father's arm, holding out her hand to him in the presence of his family and saying with an ineffable smile, —

“Here is the one who has saved me, and has cared for me as if I were his sister.”

But this day, which crowned his happiness, changed his relations with Consuelo very suddenly and more completely than he had been willing to foresee. Associated henceforth with the occupations, and restored to the habits, of the family, she was rarely alone with him. The old count, who seemed to have conceived a more lively regard for her than before her illness, showered attentions upon her with a paternal gallantry which deeply touched her. The canoness, who said nothing more, nevertheless made it a duty to watch over all her steps and to make a third in all her interviews with Albert. At last, as the young count no longer gave any signs of mental alienation, they devoted themselves to the pleasant duty of receiving, and even of attracting, their kinsfolk and neighbors, who had long been neglected. They showed them with a simple and tender ostentation how sociable and gracious the young Count of Rudolstadt had become

once more ; and as Consuelo seemed to exact of him, by her looks and her example, that he should obey the wishes of his family, he was compelled in spite of himself to resume the manners of a man of the world and an hospitable host.

This rapid transformation tried him sorely. He resigned himself to it in obedience to her whom he loved, but he would have liked to be rewarded by longer interviews and a more complete expression of sympathy. He patiently endured long days of constraint and ennui to obtain a word of approval and thanks from her in the evening. But when the canoness came like an unwelcome ghost to take her place between them, and to deprive him of this pure joy, he felt his heart grow bitter and his strength abandon him. He passed cruel nights, and often approached the cistern, which had never ceased to be full and limpid since the day on which he had ascended it, bearing Consuelo in his arms. Plunged in a mournful revery, he almost cursed the oath which he had taken never to return to his hermitage. He was frightened at feeling himself unhappy, yet unable to bury the secret of his grief in the depths of the earth.

The worn expression of his features after these sleepless nights, and the transient but more frequent return of his sombre and preoccupied manner, could not fail to strike his family and his friend. But Consuelo had found a way to scatter these clouds and regain her influence whenever she was threatened with losing it. She would begin to sing, and the young

count, charmed or subjugated, would immediately relieve himself by tears or be filled with new enthusiasm. The remedy was infallible, and when he could speak a few words to her in private, he would say, —

“Consuelo, you know the road to my heart. You possess that power denied to common minds, and in a higher degree than any one alive. You speak the divine language, you know how to express the sublime feelings and communicate the powerful emotions of your inspired soul. Sing always, therefore, when you see me failing. The words which you utter in your songs have little meaning for me ; they are only an abridged theme, an incomplete indication, upon which the musical thought is developed. I hardly listen to them ; what I hear, what reaches to the bottom of my heart, is your voice, your feeling, your inspiration. Music expresses all that is most mysterious and exalted in what the soul feels and presages. It is the manifestation of an order of ideas and sentiments superior to what human speech can convey. It is the revelation of the infinite ; and when you sing, I belong to humanity only by that divine and eternal part which it has drawn from the breast of the Creator. All the consolation and encouragement which your mouth refuses me in the ordinary course of life, all that social tyranny forbids your heart to reveal to me, is conveyed a hundred-fold by your singing. Then you communicate your whole being to me, and my soul possesses you in joy and in sorrow, in faith and in

doubt, in the transports of enthusiasm and in the languors of revery."

Sometimes Albert would say these things to Consuelo in Spanish in the presence of his family. But the evident annoyance of the canoress at this, and a feeling of propriety, kept the young girl from replying in the same tongue. At last they were alone in the garden together one day, and as he was still speaking to her of the happiness which he felt when he heard her sing, she said to him, —

"Since music is a more complete and more persuasive language than speech, why do you, who know it even better than I, perhaps, never use it with me?"

"What do you mean, Consuelo?" cried the young count, filled with amazement. "I am only a musician when I listen to you."

"Do not try to deceive me," she replied; "I have never heard a divinely human voice drawn from an instrument but once in my life, and it was by you, Albert; it was in the grotto of the Schreckenstein. I heard you that day before you saw me; I found out your secret. You must pardon me for it, and let me hear that admirable air again. I recollect some phrases of it; it revealed to me beauties in music which I had never known."

Consuelo sang in an undertone these phrases, which she recalled indistinctly, and which Albert immediately recognized.

"It is a popular hymn with Hussite words," said he. "The verses are by my ancestor, Hyncko Podiebrad,

the son of King George, and one of our national poets. We have many admirable poems by Streye, by Simon Lomnicky and several others, which have been prohibited by the imperial police. These religious and national songs, set to music by the unknown composers of Bohemia, are not all remembered by Bohemians. The populace has retained some of them, and Zdenko, who is gifted with extraordinary musical feeling and memory, knows a goodly number of them from tradition, and these I have written down and collected. They are very fine, and you will have pleasure in learning them. But I can only play them to you in my hermitage. My violin and all my music are there. I have some very precious manuscript collections of the old Catholic and Protestant composers. I will wager that you do not know either Josquin, some of whose themes Luther has transmitted to us in his chorales, or Claude the younger, or Arcadelt, or George Rhaw, or Benoit Ducis, or John of Weiss. Will not this curious exploration induce you, dear Consuelo, to revisit my grotto, from which I have been so long exiled, and to see my church, which you do not yet know?"

Consuelo listened to this proposition with trembling, although it excited her curiosity. This frightful grotto recalled to her memories which she could not retrace without shuddering, and the idea of returning to it alone with Albert, in spite of all the confidence in him which she had gained, caused her a painful emotion which he quickly perceived.

"You have a distaste for this journey, which you nevertheless promised me to take again. Let us say no more of it," he said. "Faithful to my oath, I will not take it without you."

"You remind me of mine, Albert," she answered. "I will keep it whenever you exact it. But you should recollect, my dear doctor, that I am not strong enough yet. Will you not first let me see this curious music and hear this admirable artist, who plays the violin far better than I sing?"

"I do not know whether you are jesting, dear sister, but I know very well that you will hear me nowhere but in my grotto. It is there that I have tried to make this instrument speak according to my heart, for I was ignorant of the meaning of it, though I had for several years had a brilliant and frivolous teacher, highly paid by my father. It is there that I understood what music is and what a sacrilegious mockery a great part of mankind has substituted for it. As for myself, I confess that it would be impossible for me to draw a sound from my violin if I were not prostrate in spirit before the Divinity. Even if I saw you beside me, cold and attentive only to the form of the pieces which I played, and curious to examine critically the talent I may possess, I should play so badly that I doubt if you could listen to me. Never since I have known how to use it have I touched this instrument, consecrated by me to praise of the Lord or to the voice of my ardent prayer, without feeling transported into an ideal world, and without obeying the breath of a mysterious

inspiration which I cannot summon at my will, and which leaves me without my having any means of subjugating and controlling it. Ask me for the simplest phrase when I am in cold blood, and in spite of my desire to please you, my memory would desert me and my fingers would become as uncertain as those of a child trying its first notes."

"I am not unworthy," replied Consuelo, attentive and interested, "to understand your manner of looking at music. I hope to be able to join in your prayer with a heart so devout and fervent that my presence shall not chill your inspiration. Ah, why cannot my master Porpora hear what you say concerning the sacred art, my dear Albert! He would be at your feet. And yet this great artist himself does not carry his severity so far as you do, and he thinks that the singer and the virtuoso should draw the inspiration which animates them from the sympathy and admiration of the audience which listens to them."

"That is, perhaps, because Porpora, no matter what he says, confounds the religious sentiment with the human thought in music, and perhaps because he understands sacred music as a Catholic. If I were at his point of view, I should reason as he does. If I were in communion of faith and sympathy with a public having the same religious belief as mine, I should seek in the contact of their souls an inspiration which I have thus far been obliged to seek in solitude, and which, therefore, I have found but imperfectly.

If ever I have the happiness of uniting your divine voice, Consuelo, to the strains of my violin, in a prayer after my own heart, without any doubt I shall rise higher than I have ever done, and my prayer will be more worthy of the Divinity. But do not forget, dear child, that heretofore my beliefs have been abominable to all those about me, and those who would not have been shocked would have made a jest of them. That is why I have hidden the poor gift I possess as a secret between God, Zdenko and myself. My father is fond of music, and would like to have this instrument, which is as sacred to me as the cists of the Eleusinian mysteries, serve for his amusement. What would I do, great heaven ! if I had to accompany one of Amelia's cavatinas, and what would become of my father if I were to play him one of those old Hussite airs which have led so many Bohemians to the mines or the stake, or a more modern hymn of our Lutheran fathers, from whom he blushes to be descended? Alas, Consuelo ! I know hardly anything newer. Such music exists, no doubt, and is admirable. What you have taught me of Handel and the other great masters in whom you were trained seems to me superior in many respects to what I can teach you. But to know and appreciate this music, I should have to put myself in relations with a new musical world ; and it is only with you that I can resolve to enter it, to seek in it the treasures long unknown or disdained, which you will shower upon me with open hand."

“And I,” said Consuelo with a smile, “believe that I will not undertake this education. What I heard in the grotto was so beautiful, noble and unique in its way, that I should be afraid of putting gravel into a fountain of crystal and diamonds. O Albert ! I see that you know more than I do of music. But now will you not tell me something of this secular music, which I am obliged to make my profession? I am afraid I shall discover that in this, as in the other, I have always been beneath my mission by manifesting the same ignorance or the same levity.”

“Far from thinking that, Consuelo, I consider your work sacred; and as your profession is the most sublime that a woman can embrace, so your soul is the most worthy to fill its priesthood.”

“Wait, wait, dear count !” said Consuelo with a smile; “from what I have told you of the convent where I learned music, and the church in which I have sung the praise of the Lord, you conclude that I was destined to the service of the altar or the modest teaching of the cloister. But suppose I were to tell you that the Zingarella, faithful to her origin, had been given up to chance from her girlhood, and that her whole education had been a mixture of sacred and profane studies, in both of which she took an equal interest, indifferent whether she ended in a nunnery or upon the stage.”

“Certain that God had placed his seal upon your brow, and that he had consecrated you to holiness from your mother’s womb, I should care very little

for your sake about the chance of human events, and I should preserve the conviction that you must be as holy upon the stage as in the cloister."

"What! The austerity of your ideas would not be scandalized by the contact of an actress?"

"In the dawn of religions," he replied, "the stage and the temple are a single sanctuary. In the purity of primary ideas, the ceremonies of worship are the people's spectacle; the arts are born at the foot of the altar; even the dance, that art which is now devoted to ideas of impure voluptuousness, is the music of the senses in the festivals of the gods. Music and poetry are the highest expressions of faith, and woman, dowered with genius and beauty, is priestess, sibyl and initiator. To these severe and noble forms of the past have succeeded absurd and criminal distinctions. The Roman religion has banished beauty from its festivals and woman from its ceremonies; instead of controlling and ennobling love, it has driven it out and condemned it. Beauty, woman and love could never lose their sway. Men have erected to them other temples, which they have called theatres, and where no other god has come to rule. Is it your fault, Consuelo, if these gymnasia have become dens of corruption? Nature, which performs its prodigies without regard to the reception which its masterpieces will receive among men, created you to shine among all women, and to pour out upon the world your treasures of power and genius. The cloister and the tomb are synonyms.

You could not bury the gifts of Providence without committing suicide. You had to wing your flight into a freer air. Manifestation is the condition of certain existences ; the call of nature impels them to it irresistibly, and the will of God in this respect is so positive that he withdraws from them the faculties which he has given them, if they disregard their use. The artist pines away and is extinguished in obscurity, as the thinker wanders and goes mad in absolute solitude, as every human spirit deteriorates and is destroyed in isolation and immurement. Therefore go upon the stage, Consuelo, if you wish, and bear the apparent dishonor with the resignation of a pious soul destined to suffer and to seek vainly for its country in this world, but forced to flee from the darkness which is not its element, and from which the breath of the Holy Spirit imperiously drives it."

Albert spoke with animation for a long while to this effect, drawing Consuelo with rapid steps beneath the shady trees of the warren. He had no difficulty in communicating to her his enthusiasm in art, and in making her forget the repugnance which she had at first felt to returning to the grotto. When she saw that he earnestly desired it, she too began to wish to be alone with him long enough to hear the ideas which this ardent but timid man did not dare express except to her. They were very novel ideas to Consuelo, and perhaps they were entirely new in the mouth of a patrician of that time and country. They only struck the young artist, however, as a frank and

bold formulation of those which were agitating her own mind. Devout, and an actress, she every day heard the canoness and the chaplain damn without remission her associates, the players and dancers. When she saw herself rehabilitated, as she felt that she had a right to be, by a serious and earnest man, she felt her bosom swell and her heart beat more at ease in it, as if he had raised her to the true sphere of her life. Her eyes were moist with tears and her cheeks were glowing with a bright but innocent flush, when she saw the canoness at the end of an alley, seeking her.

"Ah, my priestess!" said Albert, as he pressed against his breast the arm which was within his own, "will you not come to pray in my church?"

"Yes," she replied, "I will go, certainly."

"When?"

"Whenever you like. Do you think that I am strong enough to undertake this new exploit?"

"Yes, for we will go to the Schreckenstein in open day and by a less dangerous route than the cistern. Do you feel brave enough to rise at dawn to-morrow and to pass out of the gate as soon as it is opened? I will await you in the bushes on the side of that hill where you see a stone cross, and be your guide."

"Very well, I promise you," replied Consuelo, not without a last flutter of her heart.

"It is very cool this evening for so long a walk," said the canoness, coming up to them.

Albert did not answer; he could not dissemble.

Consuelo, who was not embarrassed by the kind of emotion which he felt, boldly passed her other arm beneath that of the canoness and gave her a hearty kiss on the shoulder. Wenceslawa would have liked to be cool towards her, but in spite of herself she felt the influence of this honest and affectionate heart. She sighed as she entered the castle, and went to say a prayer for Porporina's conversion.

CHAPTER XXII.

SEVERAL days passed without its being possible to carry out Albert's wish. Consuelo was so closely watched by the canoness that it was in vain that she rose with the dawn and was the first to pass over the drawbridge ; she always found the aunt or the chaplain wandering beneath the hedge on the esplanade, and from there looking over all the open ground which it would be necessary for her to traverse to reach the bushes on the hill. She resolved to walk about alone within sight of them, and to give up the idea of joining Albert, who, from his shadowy retreat, could see the hostile videttes, would make a long circuit through the underbush and return to the castle without being perceived.

"You went for a walk very early, Signora Porporina," said the canoness at breakfast ; "are you not afraid that the dampness of the dew may be unwholesome?"

"It is I, dear aunt," answered the young count, "who advised the signora to breathe the cool air of the morning, and I have no doubt that these walks will be very beneficial for her."

"I should have thought that a person who devotes herself to vocal music," went on the canoness, somewhat pointedly, "ought not to expose herself to our

foggy mornings. But if it is in accordance with your directions" —

"You may trust Albert's decisions," said Count Christian, "he has proved well enough that he is a good physician as well as a good son and a good friend."

The dissimulation to which Consuelo was compelled with blushes to lend herself was very painful to her. She complained gently of it to Albert, when she could speak to him apart, and begged him to give up his plan, at least until his aunt should relax her watchfulness. Albert consented, but he begged her to continue her morning walks in the neighborhood of the park, so that he might join her when a favorable moment should occur.

Consuelo would have been glad to be relieved of this. Although she was fond of walking, and felt the need of a certain amount of exercise every day outside of this enclosure of walls and moats, where her thoughts seemed stifled by a feeling of captivity, it was painful for her to deceive people whom she respected, and whose hospitality she was receiving. A little love removes many scruples; but friendship reflects, and Consuelo reflected a great deal. They were amid the last fine days of summer, for several months had already passed since she had come to dwell in the Castle of the Giants. What a summer it had been for Consuelo! The palest autumn in Italy has more light and heat. But this warm air and this sky, often covered with light clouds, white and

fleecy, had a charm and a beauty of their own. She found a pleasure in her solitary walks which was increased, perhaps, by her small desire to revisit the cavern. In spite of the resolution which she had formed, she felt that Albert would have lifted a weight from her breast if he had released her from her promise ; and when she was not under the influence of his supplicating look and his enthusiastic words, she began to bless his aunt secretly for the obstacles which she daily placed in the way of her keeping the engagement.

One morning from the bank of the torrent beside which she was wandering, she saw Albert leaning on the balustrade of his terrace, far above her. In spite of the distance which separated them, she felt herself almost continually beneath the anxious and passionate eye of this man by whom she had allowed herself to be in a certain sense dominated. "My situation is very strange," she said to herself ; "while this persevering friend watches me to see whether I am faithful to the devotion I have pledged him, I am no doubt watched from some other portion of the castle, to see that I do not have meetings with him which are forbidden by their customs and their proprieties. I do not know what is passing in the minds of them all. The Baroness Amelia does not return. The canoness seems to distrust me and grow colder towards me. Count Christian redoubles his friendliness, and professes to dread Porpora's return, which will probably be the signal for my departure. Albert seems to

have forgotten that I forbade him to hope for my love. As if he could expect everything of me, he asks me nothing for the future, yet does not put away this passion which seems to make him happy in spite of my inability to share it. Yet here I am like a declared mistress, waiting for him every morning at his rendezvous, to which I hope that he cannot come, exposing myself to the blame,—what do I know,—perhaps to the contempt, of a family which cannot understand either my devotion or my relations to him, since I cannot understand them myself, and do not see how they are to end. What a strange destiny is mine! Shall I be condemned always to devote myself without being loved by what I love, or without loving what I esteem?"

Amid these reflections a profound melancholy took possession of her soul. She felt the need of belonging to herself,—that sovereign and legitimate need, the true condition of progress and development in a superior artist. The care for Count Albert which she had imposed upon herself weighed upon her like a chain, and in the inaction and solitude of a life too monotonous and regular for her powerful organization, she was unable to cast off the bitter memory of Anzoletto and Venice.

She paused beside the rock which Albert had often pointed out to her as being that where, by a strange fatality, he had first seen her as a child, strapped to her mother's back like a pedler's pack, and wandering by hill and dale, singing like the grasshopper of

the fable, without care for the morrow, without dread of threatening old age and pitiless poverty. "Oh, my poor mother!" thought the Zingarella; "here I am, brought back by incomprehensible destiny to a spot through which you passed, and of which you preserved only a vague recollection and the token of a touching hospitality. You were young and handsome, and no doubt you found many a resting-place where love would have welcomed you, where society would have absolved and transformed you, and where at last your weary and wandering life might have ended in comfort and repose. But you felt, and you always said, that this comfort was constraint, and this repose was ennui, fatal to the soul of an artist. You were right, I feel it; for here I am in this castle, where you were willing to pass only one night like all the others,—here I am, sheltered from want and fatigue, caressed, petted, with a rich nobleman at my feet, and yet constraint is stifling me and ennui is consuming me."

Consuelo, seized with an extraordinary weariness, had seated herself upon the rock. She looked at the sand in the path, as if she thought to find there the print of her mother's naked feet. The wandering sheep had left tufts of their fleece upon the brambles. This reddish-brown wool recalled to Consuelo the exact color of the coarse cloth which composed her mother's cloak—that cloak which had so long protected her against cold and sun, dust and rain. She had seen it drop from their shoulders bit by bit.

“And we too,” she said to herself, “were poor wandering sheep, and we left shreds of our raiment upon the briers of the wayside ; but we always preserved the haughty love and the full enjoyment of our dear liberty.”

As she dreamed thus, Consuelo looked long at the path of yellow sand which wound gracefully over the hill, and which, widening out towards the foot of the valley, stretched away to the north, marking a winding line amid the green pines and black heather. “What can be finer than a road?” she said to herself. “It is the image and symbol of an active and varied life. What bright ideas are suggested to me by the capricious windings of this one ! I do not recollect the spots through which it passes, though I once travelled it. But how lovely they must be, compared with that black fortress which sleeps there eternally on its motionless rocks ! How much pleasanter to the sight are the pale, yellow gravel and the golden gorse which streaks it with shadows, than the stiff alleys and formal hedges of this prim and cold park ! Lassitude takes possession of me from merely looking at the great, dry lines of a garden. Why should my feet attempt to reach that which my eyes and my thoughts can compass at a glance ? The free road, on the other hand, which flees before me, and half hides itself in woods, invites and calls me to follow its windings and discover its mysteries. And then this road is the highway of humanity, the path of the universe. It belongs to no master who can

close it or open it at will. It is not only the powerful and the rich who have the right to tread its flowering borders and breathe its wild perfumes; every bird may hang its nest upon its branches, and every vagabond may rest his head upon its stones. No wall nor fence shuts out the horizon before him. The sky has no end; as far as his eye can reach, the highway is a land of liberty. To right and left the forests belong to masters; the road belongs to him who has naught else, — and therefore how he loves it! The coarsest beggar has an invincible affection for it. Though they build him asylums as rich as palaces, they will always be prisons; his poetry, dream and passion will always be the highway. Oh, my mother, my mother! You knew it well; you often told it to me! Why cannot I revive your ashes, which sleep so far from me beneath the wrack of the lagoons! Why cannot you take me again on your strong shoulders and bear me away there, — there, where the swallow is flying towards the blue hills, where the memory of the past and the regret for lost happiness cannot follow the light-footed artist who travels more swiftly than they, and who every day places a new horizon, a new world, between himself and the enemies of his liberty! Poor mother! why can you not still pet and abuse me, showering kisses and blows upon me by turns, like the wind which now caresses and now prostrates the young wheat of the plain, lifting it up and throwing it down again at its fancy! Your mind was of firmer temper than mine, and you would have

rescued me, by good-will or force, from the bonds in which I allow myself to be entangled at every step."

In the midst of her intoxicating yet painful revery, Consuelo heard the sound of a voice which made her start as if a red-hot iron had been placed upon her heart. It was a man's voice which rose from a ravine some distance beneath her, and was humming the air of "The Echo," one of Chiozzetto's¹ most original compositions. The person who was singing did not use his full power, and seemed short of breath from walking. He would sing a chance phrase as if to divert himself from the ennui of the journey, and would break off to speak to a companion; then he would go on with the song, repeating the same modulation several times as if to practise it, and then would talk again, all the while drawing nearer to the spot where Consuelo, motionless and panting, felt her strength deserting her. She could not hear what the traveller said to his companion, for he was still too far from her. She could not see him, as a projecting rock prevented her looking down into that part of the ravine which he had entered. But could she mistake for a moment this voice, this accent, which she knew so well, and the fragments of the song which she had taught to her ungrateful pupil and had made him repeat so often?

At last the invisible travellers approached near enough for her to hear one of them, whose voice

¹ Giovanni Croce, of Chioggia; XVI. century.

was unknown to her, say to the other in bad Italian, —

“Here, here, signor! do not go up there! The horses could not follow you, and you would lose sight of me. Follow me along the stream. See! the road is before us, and the way you are going is only a foot-path.”

The voice which Consuelo knew so well appeared to go off and down, and soon she heard it ask the name of the handsome castle on the opposite bank.

“It is Reisenburg, which means the Castle of the Giants,” replied the guide, for such he was.

Consuelo soon saw him at the bottom of the hill, on foot, and leading by the bridle two horses covered with sweat. The bad condition of the road, which had been torn up recently by the torrent, had compelled the riders to dismount. The traveller followed some distance behind, and at last Consuelo could see him by leaning over the rock which concealed her. His back was towards her, and he wore a travelling-costume which changed his figure and even his walk. If she had not heard his voice, she would not have thought that it was he. But he stopped to look at the castle, and taking off his broad-brimmed hat, wiped his face with his handkerchief. Although she could only see him from above, she recognized his thick hair, golden and curly, and the motion which he was accustomed to make with his hand to raise it from his brow and neck when he was warm.

“This castle looks very respectable,” he said, “and

if I had time I should like to go and ask breakfast of the giants who inhabit it."

"Oh, do not try that!" said the guide, shaking his head; "the Rudolstadts only receive beggars or kinsfolk."

"So inhospitable as that? The devil take them!"

"But listen! They have something to conceal."

"A treasure or a crime?"

"Oh, nothing; their son, who is mad."

"The devil take him too, in that case! It would be to render them a service."

The guide began to laugh. Anzoleto began to sing again.

"Come," said the guide stopping, "we are over the bad part of the road; if you will mount again, we can gallop quite to Tusta. The road is excellent all the way; nothing but sand. There you come to the high road to Prague, and good post-horses."

"Then," said Anzoleto, arranging his stirrups, "I shall be able to say, 'The devil take you too!' for your old hacks, your mountain roads and yourself are beginning to bore me dreadfully."

As he said this he sprang lightly on his horse, stuck in his spurs, and without concern for the guide, who could hardly follow him, set out like a flash towards the north, raising whirlwinds of dust on that road at which Consuelo had so long been looking, and where she so little expected to see the enemy of her life, the eternal care of her heart, passing like a fatal vision.

She followed him with her eyes in a state of stupor

impossible to describe. Frozen by disgust and fear, she had remained hidden and trembling so long as he was within reach of her voice. But when she saw him departing, when she considered that she was about to lose sight of him, perhaps forever, she only felt a horrible despair. She rushed upon the rock to see him still longer, and the indestructible love she bore him being aroused to frenzy, she wished to cry out to him to call him back. But her voice died on her lips. It seemed to her that the hand of death was clutching her throat and tearing her bosom ; and as she fell exhausted at the foot of the rock, she found herself in the arms of Albert, who had approached without her observing him, and who carried her into a darker and more secluded part of the mountain.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE fear that her emotion might betray a secret which she had until then concealed so well in the depths of her heart, restored to Consuelo strength to command herself, and to cause Albert to believe that there was nothing extraordinary in the situation in which he had surprised her. At the moment when the young count had received her, pale and half fainting, into his arms, Anzoleto and his guide had just disappeared in the distance among the pines, and Albert could attribute to himself the danger which she had incurred of falling over the precipice. The idea of this danger, which he believed had been caused by fright at his approach, disturbed him so greatly that he hardly perceived at first the agitation which marked her replies. Consuelo, in whom he still sometimes inspired a certain superstitious awe, feared that he might divine a part of the mystery through his presentiments. But Albert, since love had made him live the life of other men, seemed to have lost the somewhat supernatural faculties which he had formerly possessed. She was soon able to master her emotion, and the proposal which he made of conducting her to his hermitage did not then cause her the aversion which she would have felt a few hours earlier. It seemed to her that the austere soul

and the gloomy dwelling of this man, who was so seriously devoted to her, would open before her a refuge where she would find the calmness and strength she needed to struggle against the recollection of her passion. "It is Providence which sends me this friend amid my trials," she thought, "and the sombre sanctuary where he wishes to lead me is an emblem of the tomb in which I had better bury myself than follow the footsteps of the evil genius whom I have just seen pass. Oh, yes, my God! rather than that I should unite myself to him, cause the earth to open beneath my feet, and never restore me to the land of the living!"

"Dear Consolation," said Albert, "I was coming to tell you that my aunt has to receive and examine the accounts of her farmers this morning, and is not thinking of us, so that at last we are free to accomplish our pilgrimage. However, if you still feel any repugnance to visiting places which recall so many sufferings and terrors" —

"No, my friend, no!" replied Consuelo; "I feel, on the contrary, that I have never been more disposed to pray in your church, and to join my soul to yours on the wings of that sacred song which you have promised to let me hear."

They set out together for the Schreckenstein, and as she went into the woods in a direction opposite to that which Anzoletto had taken, Consuelo felt relieved, as if each step that she made destroyed more and more the fatal charm, the effects of which she had just

experienced. She walked so swiftly and so resolutely, although grave and reserved, that Count Albert might have attributed this frank haste solely to the desire of pleasing him, if it had not been for that distrust of himself and his fate which formed the basis of his character.

He led her to the foot of the Schreckenstein, and to the entrance of a grotto filled with stagnant water and choked up with rank vegetation.

"This grotto, in which you can see some traces of a vaulted construction," he said, "is called in the neighborhood the Monk's Cave. Some think that it was the cellar of a religious house when there was a fortified village where these ruins now are; others say that it was latterly the retreat of a repentant criminal, who had become a hermit from penitence. Whichever is true, nobody dares to go into it, and every one believes that the water which fills it is poisonous, because of the veins of copper through which it has worked its way. But in fact it is neither deep nor dangerous; it lies upon a bed of rock, and we shall easily pass through it, Consuelo, if you will once more intrust yourself to the strength of my arm and the sacredness of my love for you."

After saying this he made sure that no one had followed them or could see them, and then took her in his arms, that she might not be obliged to wet her feet. He waded knee-deep through the pool, and forced his way between the bushes and festoons of ivy which concealed the end of the grotto. After a

very few steps, he set her down upon fine dry sand in an entirely dark spot where he immediately lit the lantern which he had provided ; and after a few turns through passages much like those which Consuelo had already traversed with him, they found themselves at a door of the cell opposite to that through which she had passed on her former visit.

“This subterranean construction was originally intended to serve as a refuge in time of war, either for the principal inhabitants of the village which covered the hill, or for the lords of the Castle of the Giants, of which this village was a fief, and who could reach it secretly by the passages which you know. If a hermit has since then inhabited the Monk’s Cave, as they assert, it is probable that he knew of this retreat ; for the gallery through which we have just passed seemed to me to have been cleared out somewhat recently, while I found those which lead to the castle choked up in many places with earth and gravel, which I had great trouble in removing. Besides that, the relics which I found here — the fragments of a mat, a jug, a crucifix, a lamp, and finally the bones of a man lying on his back with his hands still crossed upon his breast in the attitude of a last prayer at the hour of his last sleep — proved to me that here a hermit had quietly and peacefully closed his mysterious existence. Our peasants believe that the soul of the hermit still inhabits the interior of the mountain. They say that they have often seen him wandering in the neighborhood or flitting above the crest of the hill in

the moonlight ; that they have heard him pray, sigh and moan, and even that sometimes a strange and incomprehensible music has been borne to them upon the wings of the night. I myself, Consuelo, when the excitement of despair peopled the woods about me with phantoms and marvels, have thought I saw the dark penitent kneeling beneath the Hussite ; I have fancied that I heard his plaintive voice and his heart-rending sighs arise from the depths of the abyss. But since I have discovered and inhabited this cell, I do not recollect that I have found any other hermit here than myself, that I have met any other spectre than my own face, or that I have heard any sighs except those which escaped from my own breast."

Consuelo, since her first interview with Albert in this passage, had never heard him utter irrational remarks. Therefore she had never dared to recall to him the strange words which he spoke that night, or the hallucinations in the midst of which she had surprised him. She was astonished to see that now he had absolutely forgotten them, and not daring to recall them to him, she was satisfied with asking him if the tranquillity of such a solitude had really freed him from the agitation of which he spoke.

"I cannot tell you exactly," he replied, "and unless you insist upon it, I do not wish to force my memory to this labor. I am convinced that I was formerly a prey to real madness. The efforts which I made to conceal it betrayed it still more by exasperating it. When, thanks to Zdenko, who knew by tradition the

secret of those subterranean constructions, I at last found a way to escape from the anxiety of my family and to hide my fits of despair, my existence changed. I recovered partial command of myself, and sure of being able to avoid disagreeable witnesses whenever I was too hard pressed by my disease, I succeeded in playing at home the part of a tranquil man, resigned to everything."

Consuelo saw that poor Albert still preserved some illusions, but she felt that this was not the time to undeceive him ; and congratulating herself on seeing him speak so coolly and indifferently of his past, she began to examine the cell more attentively than she had been able to do before. She saw that the care and neatness which she had formerly observed no longer existed, and that the dampness of the walls, the chilliness of the atmosphere and the mouldiness of the books revealed an entire abandonment.

"You see that I have kept my word," said Albert, who had just relighted the stove with great difficulty ; "I have not set foot here since you led me out by the omnipotence which you have over me."

Consuelo had a question on her lips which she hastily checked. She was about to ask whether Zdenko, the faithful servant and watchful guardian, had also neglected and abandoned the hermitage. But she recollected the profound sadness which had come over Albert whenever she had ventured to ask what had become of him, and why she had never seen him since her terrible encounter with him in the underground

passage. Albert had always eluded these questions, either by pretending not to hear them, or by begging her not to be disturbed, nor to have any fears for the "innocent." She had at first believed that Zdenko had received and faithfully obeyed an order never to appear before her eyes. But when she resumed her solitary walks, Albert, to reassure her completely, had sworn to her with a deadly paleness on his face that she would not meet Zdenko, because he had set out on a long journey. And in fact no one had seen him since that time, and they thought that he had died in some out-of-the-way place, or had left the country.

Consuelo had not believed in either his death or his departure. She knew Zdenko's passionate attachment to Albert too well for her to regard an entire separation between them as possible. As for his death, she never thought of it without a profound terror which she dared not admit to herself, when she remembered the fearful oath which Albert had made in his excitement to sacrifice the life of this unhappy creature, if need be, to the peace of her he loved. But she drove away this frightful suspicion when she recalled the gentleness and humanity of which Albert's whole life had given evidence. Besides, he had enjoyed a perfect tranquillity for several months, and no apparent demonstration on the part of Zdenko had rekindled the fury which the young count had shown for an instant. Moreover he had forgotten the painful moment which Consuelo was striving to forget also. The only events in the underground passage which he recollected were

those which occurred when he was in possession of his senses. Consuelo had therefore come to the conclusion that he must have forbidden Zdenko to enter or approach the castle, and that from anger or grief the poor man had condemned himself to a voluntary captivity in the hermitage. She presumed that he only left it at night to take fresh air or to converse with Albert, who no doubt at least took care of the idiot's subsistence, as Zdenko had so long cared for his. When she saw the state of his cell, Consuelo was reduced to believing that the idiot was sulky towards his master, and no longer kept his abandoned retreat in order ; and as Albert had again assured her when they came into the grotto that she would find nothing there to frighten her, she took advantage of the moment when he was striving to unlock the rusty door into what he called his church to open that which led to Zdenko's cell, where no doubt she would find traces of his recent presence. The door yielded as soon as she had turned the key, but the darkness prevented her seeing anything. She waited till Albert had passed into the mysterious oratory which he wished to show her, and which he went to prepare for her reception ; then she took a torch and returned cautiously to Zdenko's room, not without trembling at the idea of finding him there in person. But she did not discover even a trace of his existence. The bed of leaves and the sheepskin had been taken away. The rough chair, the tools and the felt sandals had all disappeared ; and one would have said, to see the damp-

ness which glistened upon the walls beneath the torchlight, that this roof had never sheltered the sleep of a living being.

A sentiment of sadness and dread came over her at this discovery. A dark mystery inwrapped the fate of this unfortunate being, and Consuelo said to herself with terror that she was perhaps the cause of a deplorable event. There were two men in Albert, one wise, the other mad ; one kindly, charitable and tender, the other strange, savage and perhaps violent and pitiless in his decisions. The singular sort of identity which he had formerly imagined between himself and the bloody fanatic John Ziska, his love for the memories of Hussite Bohemia, the silent and patient, but absolute and profound, passion which he entertained for Consuelo, all of which came at this moment into the young girl's mind, seemed to confirm the most painful suspicions. Motionless and chilled with terror, she hardly dared to look at the bare and cold floor of the grotto, for fear of finding on it traces of blood.

She was still plunged in these dreadful reflections when she heard Albert tuning his violin, and soon the admirable voice of the instrument sang her the old psalm which she had so much wished to hear again. The music was original, and Albert delivered it with such fine and broad feeling that she forgot all her anguish, and drew gently near the spot where he was, drawn and fascinated by a magnetic power.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE door of Albert's "church" had been left open, and Consuelo paused upon the threshold to scan both the inspired virtuoso and the strange sanctuary. This so-called church was only an immense grotto, carved or, more properly, broken irregularly in the rock by the hands of nature, and excavated in large part by the action of water. A number of scattered torches planted on huge blocks lit with fantastic rays the greenish sides of the rock and glimmered before deep recesses, in which appeared the dim forms of long stalactites, like spectres which seek the light and fly from it by turns. The enormous deposits which the water had formerly left on the walls of the cavern displayed a thousand capricious aspects. Sometimes they rolled like monstrous serpents, interlacing and devouring each other. Sometimes they sprang from the earth and hung from the roof like huge needles, which when they met resembled colossal teeth bristling at the opening of the yawning jaws formed by the recesses of the rock. Elsewhere they were like misshapen statues, giant representations of the barbarous gods of antiquity. A rock foliage, — great lichens, rough as dragon's scales; festoons of hartstongue, large and heavy leaved; clumps of young cypresses recently planted in the midst of the grotto on mounds of earth, — all contributed to give

to this spot a sombre, grandiose and terrible character which strongly impressed the young artist. But admiration quickly succeeded to her first feeling of fright. She drew near and saw Albert standing beside the spring which burst out of the middle of the cavern. The water was abundant in its flow, but it was enclosed in so deep a basin that no bubbling was perceptible at the surface. It was still and even as a block of dark sapphire, and the beautiful aquatic plants with which Albert and Zdenko had surrounded its margin were not shaken by the slightest trembling. The spring was hot at its source, and the warm exhalations which it spread throughout the cavern created a soft and damp atmosphere, favorable to vegetation. It escaped from its basin by several streams, some of which disappeared beneath the rocks with a deep murmur, while others flowed silently in limpid brooks through the interior of the grotto, to disappear in the dark recesses which prolonged its extent indefinitely.

When Count Albert, who had thus far been only trying the strings of his violin, saw Consuelo coming towards him, he went to meet her and helped her over the streams formed by the spring, and over which he had thrown trunks of trees at the deep spots. In other places scattered stones which rose above the level of the water offered an easy passage to his practised steps. He extended his hand to aid her and sometimes lifted her in his arms. But now Consuelo was afraid, not of the torrent, which flowed dark and silent beneath her feet, but of this mysterious guide

towards whom an irresistible sympathy attracted her, while at the same time an undefinable aversion repelled her. When she reached the edge of the spring, she saw on a large stone which hung several feet above it an object which was little calculated to reassure her. It was a sort of quadrangular monument, formed of human skulls and bones artistically arranged, as one sees them in the catacombs.

“Do not be frightened,” said Albert, who felt her shudder. “These noble remains are those of martyrs of my religion, and they form the altar before which I love to pray and meditate.”

“What is your religion, Albert?” said Consuelo. “Are they the bones of Hussites or Catholics? Were not both victims of an impious rage and martyrs to a faith equally lively on both sides? Is it true that you have chosen the Hussite belief in preference to that of your family, and that no reforms later than those of John Huss seem to you austere or energetic enough? Tell me, Albert, how much am I to believe of what they have told me about you?”

“If they have told you that I prefer the reform of the Hussites to that of the Lutherans and the great Procopius to the vindictive Calvin, as much as I prefer the exploits of the Taborites to those of Wallenstein’s soldiers, they have told you the truth, Consuelo. But what matters my belief to you, who feel the truth by intuition, and know the Divinity better than I do? God forbid that I should have drawn you into this spot to burden your pure soul and trouble your peaceful

conscience with the meditations and torments of my dreams. Remain what you are, Consuelo. You were born pious and holy ; moreover, you were born poor and obscure, and nothing has tended to alter in you the uprightness of reason and the light of equity. We can pray together without arguing, — you who know everything without having learned anything, and I who know very little after studying much. In whatever temple you have to raise your voice, the knowledge of the true God will be in your heart, and the sentiment of the true faith will enkindle your soul. It is not to instruct you, but that the revelation may pass from you to me, that I desire the union of our voices and our spirits before this altar, built of the bones of my forefathers.”

“ Then I was not mistaken in supposing that these noble remains, as you call them, are those of Hussites cast into the Schreckenstein cistern by the bloody fury of the civil wars in the time of your ancestor John Ziska, who, they say, made a terrible reprisal for it. I have also been told that after burning the village he filled up the well. It seems to me that I can see, in the darkness of the roof, a circle of hewn stone which shows me that I am precisely under the spot where I have several times sat down, weary with vainly seeking for you. Tell me, Count Albert, is this indeed the spot which you have baptized the Rock of Expiation ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Albert, “ it is here that tortures and frightful acts of violence have consecrated the asylum

of my prayer and the sanctuary of my sorrow. You see enormous blocks hanging above our heads and others scattered on the banks of the spring. The strong hands of the Taborites cast them there by the command of him whom they called the redoubtable blind man; but they only serve to push back the waters towards the subterranean beds which they were then making. The lining of the well was broken, and I have hidden the ruins beneath the cypresses which I have planted. A whole mountain would need to have been thrown in here to fill up this cavern. The blocks which they cast into the neck of the cistern were caught there by a winding staircase, like that by which you had the courage to descend into the well of my terrace at the Castle of the Giants. Since then, the gradual sinking of the mountain has forced them together and locked them more tightly every day. If a piece drops occasionally, it is only in the heavy frosts of winter; you need not fear the fall of the stones now."

"I was not thinking of that, Albert," said Consuelo, fixing her eyes upon the ghastly altar upon which he had laid his Stradivarius. "I was asking myself why you pay exclusive reverence to the memory and remains of these victims, as if there had not been martyrs on the other side, and as if the crimes of one party were more pardonable than those of the other."

Consuelo said this in a severe tone, and looking at Albert with distrust. The recollection of Zdenko re-

turned to her, and all her questions had connection in her mind with an examination in criminal justice to which she would have subjected him if she had dared.

The painful emotion which suddenly overcame the count seemed to her an admission of remorse. He passed his hands over his brow, and then pressed them against his breast, as if he felt his heart breaking. His face changed frightfully, and Consuelo feared that he might have understood her too well.

"You do not know the pain you inflict upon me," he cried, leaning upon his altar of bones, and bending his head towards those grinning skulls which seemed to be looking at him from the hollow orbits of their eyes. "No, you cannot know it, Consuelo, and your cold reflections awake in me the memory of the fatal days that I have passed. You do not know that you are speaking to a man who has lived ages of grief, and who, after having been the blind instrument of inflexible justice in the hand of God, has received his reward and undergone his punishment. I have suffered and wept so much, expiated my dreadful destiny so fully, made such efforts to repair the wrongs to which fate drove me, that I flattered myself I could at last forget them. Forget! It was the need which consumed my burning bosom, the prayer of my every instant, the sign of my alliance with men and my reconciliation with God, which I had been imploring here for years, prostrate on these bones! When first I saw you, Consuelo, I began to hope; and when you had

pity on me, I began to believe I was saved. Look ! Do you see this wreath of flowers, faded and almost dropping to dust, which I had placed about the skull which crowns the altar? You do not know them, but I have watered them with many a bitter but delicious tear, for it was you who plucked them, you who sent them to me by the companion of my misery, the faithful sharer of my burial. As I covered them with my tears and kisses, I asked myself anxiously if you could ever have a true and deep affection for a criminal like me, a pitiless fanatic, a tyrant without compassion."

"But what are these crimes which you have committed?" said Consuelo earnestly, torn by a thousand conflicting sentiments and emboldened by Albert's profound prostration. "If you have a confession to make, make it here, make it now, before me, that I may know if I can absolve and love you."

"Yes, you can absolve me ! For he whom you know, Albert of Rudolstadt, has led a life as pure as a little child's. But he whom you do not know, John Ziska the Calixtine, has been drawn by the wrath of Heaven into a career of iniquity."

Consuelo saw what an imprudence she had committed in reviving the fire which slept beneath the ashes, and in recalling poor Albert to the ideas of his monomania by her questions. It was not the time to combat them by reasoning ; she attempted to calm him by means which his madness itself suggested.

"It is enough, Albert," she said. "If your present existence is devoted to prayer and repentance, you have nothing more to expiate, and God pardons John Ziska."

"God does not reveal himself directly to the humble creatures who serve him," replied the count, shaking his head. "He abases or exalts them by employing some for the salvation or for the punishment of others. We are all interpreters of his will, when we endeavor to correct or console our fellow-men in a spirit of charity. You have not the right, maiden, to pronounce my absolution. A priest himself has not this high mission, which churchly pride has usurped. But you can communicate divine grace to me by loving me. Your love can reconcile me with heaven, and cause me to forget those days which they call the history of past ages. Though you made me the sublimest promises in the name of the Almighty, I could not believe you; I should see in it nothing but a noble and generous fanaticism. Place your hand upon your heart, ask it if the thought of me dwells in it, if love of me fills it; and if it replies, yes, this yes will be the sacramental formula of my absolution, the pledge of my rehabilitation, the charm which will restore to me rest, happiness, forgetfulness! It is in this way alone that you can be the priestess of my religion, and that my soul can be unbound in heaven as the Catholic believes his to be by the mouth of his confessor. Say that you love me!" he cried, turning passionately towards her as

if to cast his arms about her. But she recoiled, frightened at the oath which he asked of her, and he fell back upon the bones, breathing a deep sigh, and crying, "I foresaw that she could never love me, that I should never be pardoned and that I could never forget the accursed days when I did not know her!"

"Albert, dear Albert!" said Consuelo, deeply moved at the grief which tormented him, "listen to me with a little courage. You reproach me for wishing to lure you with the idea of a miracle, and yet you ask me for a still greater one. God, who sees everything, and who appreciates our deserts, can forgive everything. But can a weak and finite being like me, above all, understand and accept by the mere effort of her thought and her devotion so strange a love as yours? It seems to me that it is for you to inspire me with the exclusive affection which you ask of me, and which it does not depend upon me to give you, especially when I know you so little. Since we are speaking that mystical language of devotion, of which I learned something in my childhood, I will tell you that one must be in a state of grace to be delivered from one's sins. Well, do you deserve the sort of absolution which you ask of my love? You demand the purest, tenderest and sweetest sentiment, and it seems to me that your soul is not inclined towards either sweetness or sentiment. You preserve in it the darkest thoughts and something like eternal resentment."

"What do you mean, Consuelo? I do not understand you."

"I mean that you are still a victim to these horrible dreams, these ideas of murder and visions of blood. You weep for crimes which you think you committed several centuries ago, and yet you delight in their recollection, for you call them glorious and sublime; you attribute them to the will of Heaven and the just anger of God. In short, you are at once frightened, yet proud, at playing in your imagination the part of a destroying angel. While you believe that you have really been a man of vengeance and destruction in the past, one would think that you had retained an instinct, a temptation and almost a taste for that frightful destiny, since you are always looking beyond your present life, and weeping over yourself as over a criminal condemned to further crime."

"No, thanks to the Almighty Father of souls, who takes them back and purifies them again in the love of his bosom," cried Rudolstadt, as he raised his hands to heaven, — "no, I have preserved no instinct of violence or ferocity. It is enough to know that I have been compelled to pass, sword and torch in hand, through those barbarous times which, in our bold and fanatical language, we call the times of zeal and fury. But you do not know history, sublime maiden; you do not know the past, and the destiny of nations is an enigma to you, who have no doubt always had an errand of peace, the part of a consol-

ing angel. Yet it is needful that you should know something of these frightful truths, and have an idea of what the justice of God sometimes imposes on unfortunate man."

"Then speak, Albert! explain to me how vain disputes about the ceremonies of the communion could be so important and sacred on either side that nations should butcher each other in the name of the divine Eucharist."

"You are right to call it divine," replied Albert, as he seated himself beside Consuelo on the edge of the spring. "This symbol of equality, this ceremony instituted by a being divine above all men, to immortalize the principle of fraternity, merits nothing less from you, who are the equal of the greatest powers and the noblest creatures that the human race can boast! And yet there are vain and mad beings who consider you of a race inferior to their own, and who believe that your blood is less precious than that of the kings and princes of the earth. What would you think of me, Consuelo, if I were to raise myself above you in thought because I am sprung from those kings and princes?"

"I should pardon a prejudice which your whole caste holds sacred, and against which I should never think of rebelling, happy as I am at being born free and like the humble, whom I love better than the great."

"You would pardon me, Consuelo, but you would esteem me little, and you would not be here, alone

with me, tranquil beside a man who adores you, and certain that he will respect you as much as if you had been proclaimed Empress of Germany by right of birth. Oh, let me believe that without this knowledge of my character and principles you would not have felt for me that heavenly pity which brought you here the first time ! Well, dear sister, recognize in your heart, to which I address myself (for I do not wish to weary your mind with philosophical arguments), that equality is holy, that it is the will of the Father of men, and that it is the duty of men to endeavor to establish it among themselves. When nations were strongly attached to the ceremonies of their religion, the communion represented to them the only equality which the laws of society allowed them to enjoy. The poor and the weak found in it a consolation and a religious promise which enabled them to support their own ills and hope for better days for their descendants. The Bohemian nation had always wished to observe the same eucharistic rites that the Apostles taught and practised. It was, indeed, the ancient and fraternal communion, the banquet of equality, the representation of the reign of God ; that is to say, of the communal life, which was to be realized upon the face of the earth. One day the Roman Church, which had reduced peoples and kings beneath her despotic and ambitious law, wished to separate the Christian from the priest, the nation from the priesthood, the people from the clergy. It placed the chalice in the hands of its ministers so that they

might hide the Divinity in mysterious tabernacles ; and, by absurd interpretations these priests exalted the Eucharist into an idolatrous worship, in which, save at their good pleasure, the citizens had no right to share. They seized upon the keys of conscience in the secrecy of the confessional, and the holy cup, the glorious cup, in which the indigent could assuage the thirst of their souls, was enclosed in chests of cedar and gold, from which it never again issued, save to approach the lips of the priest. He alone was worthy to drink the blood and the tears of Christ. The humble believer must kneel before him and lick his hands to eat the bread of angels. Now do you understand why the people cried with one voice, ‘The cup ! Restore to us the cup ! The cup to the lowly, to children, to women, to sinners and to madmen ! The cup to all the poor, to all the infirm in body and mind !’ This was the cry of revolt and of rallying for all Bohemia. You know the rest, Consuelo ; you know that to this first idea, which combined in a religious symbol all the happiness and noble needs of a proud and generous people, came to be united, in consequence of persecution, and in the midst of a terrible struggle against the surrounding nations, all the ideas of patriotic liberty and national honor. The conquest of the cup brought with it the noblest conquests and created a new society. And now if history, interpreted by ignorant or sceptical judges, tells you that the rage for blood and the thirst for gold alone kindled those dreadful wars, be sure that it is a lie to

God and men. It is very true that private hatreds and ambitions sullied the exploits of our fathers ; but it was the old spirit of domination and avarice which still possessed the rich and the noble. They alone endangered and often betrayed the holy cause. The people, on the other hand, barbarous but sincere, fanatical but inspired, became incarnate in sects whose poetical names are known to you. The Taborites, the Orebites, the Orphans, the Brothers of the Union, — those were the people, martyrs to their belief, refugees upon their mountains, strictly observing the law of community and absolute equality, believing in the eternal life of the souls of the inhabitants of this world, awaiting the coming and the feast of Jesus Christ, of John Huss, of John Ziska, of Procopius the Bald, and of all those invincible chiefs who had preached and served liberty. To my mind, Consuelo, this belief was not a fiction. The part which we have to play upon earth is not so short as is commonly believed, and our duties extend beyond the tomb. As for the narrow and childish attachment to the formulas and practices of the Hussite religion, with which it has pleased the chaplain and, perhaps, my good but weak relatives to charge me, — if it is true that in my moments of agitation and fever I have seemed to confound the symbol with the principle and the figure with the idea, do not despise me too much, Consuelo. In the bottom of my heart I have never really wished to revive in myself these forgotten rites, which have no meaning now. There are other

figures and other symbols which would better befit the more enlightened men of to-day, if they would consent to open their eyes, and if the yoke of slavery permitted the nations of the world to seek the religion of liberty. They have uncharitably and falsely interpreted my sympathies, tastes, and habits. Weary of seeing the intellectual sterility and vanity of the men of this age, I have needed to refresh my pitying soul by intercourse with simple or unfortunate spirits. I have taken pleasure in conversing with these idiots, vagabonds, and children disinherited of this world's goods and the affection of their fellow-men; in discovering in the innocent wanderings of those who are called insane the fugitive but sometimes dazzling rays of heavenly wisdom; in the confessions of those who are called guilty and reprobate, the deep though sullied traces of justice and innocence under the form of remorse and regret. When they saw me act in this way, sitting at the table of the ignorant or by the bedside of the robber, they charitably concluded that I was addicted to heretical practices, and even to sorcery. What can I reply to such accusations? And when my mind, impressed by reading and meditating upon the history of my country, betrayed itself by words which resembled, and which perhaps were, delirium, they were afraid of me, as of a madman inspired by the devil! The devil! Do you know what he is, Consuelo, and need I explain to you the mysterious allegory concerning him, created by the priests of all religions?"

“Yes, my friend,” said Consuelo, who, reassured and almost persuaded, had forgotten that her hand was in Albert’s, “explain to me what Satan is. To tell you the truth, although I have always believed in God, and have never openly rebelled against what they told me of him, I have never been able to believe in the devil. If he existed, God would chain him down so far from him and from us that we could never know of him.”

“If he existed, he could only be a monstrous creation of that God whom the most impious sophists have preferred rather to deny than not to recognize as the type and ideal of all perfection, knowledge and love. How could perfection have begotten evil ; knowledge, lies ; love, hatred and perversity ? It is a fable which must be attributed to the infancy of the human race, when the plagues and scourges of the physical world made the trembling children of the earth believe that there were two gods, two creating and sovereign spirits ; one the source of all our good, the other of all our ills, — two principles almost equal, since the reign of Eblis was to last numberless centuries, and only succumb after terrible battles in the spheres of the empyrean. But why, after the preaching of Jesus, and the pure light of the Gospel, did the priests dare to revive and sanction in the mind of the people this vulgar belief of the ancient gods ? It was because the conception of good and evil had remained obscure and incomplete in the mind of man, either from the insufficiency or the wrong interpretation of

the apostolic doctrine. They had admitted and consecrated the principle of an absolute division between the rights and destinies of the spirit and the flesh, in the attributes of the spiritual and the temporal. Christian asceticism exalted the soul and debased the body. Little by little, fanaticism having carried this contempt of material life to excess, and society having preserved the old system of castes in spite of the doctrine of Jesus, a small number of men continued to live and reign by intelligence, while the greater number vegetated in the darkness of superstition. Then it happened in reality that the enlightened and powerful castes, especially the clergy, were the soul of society, and that the people was only the body. What then, in this sense, was the true patron of the intelligent beings? God. And of the ignorant? The devil. For God gave the life of the soul, and forbade that of the senses, towards which Satan was continually drawing the weak and coarse. A mysterious and singular sect dreamed of rehabilitating the life of the flesh, and of reuniting in one divine principle these two which had been arbitrarily divided. It wished to sanction love, equality, the community of all men, the elements of happiness. It was a right and holy idea. It does not matter what abuses and excesses it produced. But it strove to raise from its abjection the so-called principle of evil, and to make it, on the contrary, the servant and agent of good. Satan was absolved by these philosophies, and restored to the chorus of heavenly spirits, and by poetic

interpretation they professed to regard Michael and the archangels of his host as oppressors and usurpers of glory and power. It was quite truly a figure of the pontiffs and princes of the Church, who had trodden down beneath fictions of hell the religion of equality and the principle of happiness for the human family. The dark and mournful Lucifer emerged from the pit, therefore, where he had lain groaning in chains for ages, like the divine Prometheus. His liberators did not dare to call upon him openly, but in mysterious and profound formulas they expressed the idea of his apotheosis and his future reign over humanity, too long dethroned, debased and calumniated like him. But no doubt I am wearying you with all these details. Pardon me, dear Consuelo, I have been represented to you as antichrist and a worshipper of the devil ; I wished to justify myself to you, and show myself a little less superstitious than those who accuse me."

"You do not weary me at all," said Consuelo, with a gentle smile, "and I am glad to learn that I did not make a compact with the enemy of the human race one night when I made use of a Lollard formula."

"I see that you are very learned in that respect," said Albert.

He continued to explain to her the exalted meaning of those great truths which are called heretical, and which the sophists of Catholicism have buried beneath accusations and convictions of bad faith. Little by little he became animated as he revealed

the study, the contemplation and the austere reveries which had led him to asceticism and superstition in days which he believed more distant than they really were. By endeavoring to make this confession clear and simple, he acquired an extraordinary clearness of intellect, speaking of himself with as much sincerity and judgment as if another had been in question, and condemning the failings of his own reason as if he had long been cured of these dangerous attacks. He spoke so wisely, that apart from the notion of time, which seemed inappreciable by him in the detail of his present life (since he began to blame himself for having formerly believed himself John Ziska, Wratislaw, Podiebrad and several other personages of the past, without recollecting that half an hour before he had fallen again into this same aberration), it was impossible for Consuelo not to recognize in him a superior man, enlightened by more extended learning and by more generous, and therefore more just, ideas than any one she had ever met.

Little by little the attention and interest with which she listened to him, the lively intelligence which shone in the great eyes of this girl, swift to understand, patient in pursuing any study and strong to assimilate every lofty idea, animated Rudolstadt with a deeper conviction, and his eloquence became striking. Consuelo, after a few questions and objections to which he replied successfully, ceased to think so much of satisfying her natural curiosity for ideas as of

enjoying the sort of intoxicating admiration which Albert caused her. She forgot all that had disturbed her during the day,—Anzoletto, Zdenko and the bones beneath her eyes. A sort of fascination came over her, and the picturesque spot where she was, with its cypresses, its terrible rocks and its ghastly altar, seemed to her, by the trembling light of the torches, a sort of Elysium where stalked august and solemn apparitions. Although she was quite awake, her perceptive faculties, which she had exerted rather too much for her poetical organization, fell into a sort of slumber. No longer hearing what Albert said to her, but plunged in a delicious ecstasy, she grew tender at the thought of this Satan whom he had shown to her as a great idea misunderstood, and which her artistic imagination pictured as a noble figure, pale and sorrowful, a companion to that of the Christ, gently bending over her, the daughter of the people and the proscribed child of the universal family. Suddenly she perceived that Albert was no longer talking to her, that he no longer held her hand, that he was no longer seated beside her, but was erect a few steps from her, beside the altar, and that he was playing upon his violin the strange music which had already surprised and charmed her.

CHAPTER XXV.

ALBERT first played upon his instrument several of those hymns whose authors are unknown to us and perhaps forgotten even in Bohemia, but the precious tradition of which Zdenko had preserved. The count had saturated his mind with these compositions, which are barbarous at first, but profoundly touching and really beautiful to a serious and enlightened taste, and he had assimilated them so completely that he could improvise for a long while on their motives, intermingling his own ideas, resuming and developing the primitive feeling of the composition, and abandoning himself to his personal inspiration, without altering by his ingenious and learned interpretation the original, austere and striking character of these ancient airs. Consuelo had resolved to remember these precious remnants of the ardent popular genius of Bohemia. But all idea of examination soon became impossible to her, as much because of the dreamy disposition in which she was, as because of a vague quality in the music, unfamiliar to her ear.

There is a music which might be called natural, because it is not the product of knowledge and reflection, but of an inspiration which avoids the rigor of rules and conventionality. It is popular music, especially that of the peasants. What beautiful

poems are born, live and die among them without having had the honors of a correct notation, and without having condescended to enclose themselves in the absolute version of a settled theme ! The unknown artist who improvises his rustic ballad as he keeps his flocks or holds the handle of his plough (and they still exist, even in districts which seem least poetic) would have difficulty in retaining and fixing his fugitive ideas. He repeats this ballad to other musicians, children of nature like himself, and these bear it from hamlet to hamlet, from cottage to cottage, each one modifying it to suit his individual genius. That is why pastoral songs and romances, so fascinating in their simplicity or so deep in their sentiment, are lost for the most part, and have hardly more than a century's existence in the memory of peasants. Musicians trained to the rules of the art do not care enough for them to collect them. Most disdain them, from lack of an intelligence pure enough and a sentiment lofty enough to understand them ; others are repelled by the difficulty which they immediately encounter when they wish to find that true and original version which no longer exists, perhaps, for the composer himself, and which has certainly never been recognized as a determinate and invariable model by his numerous interpreters. Some have changed it from ignorance ; others have developed it, ornamented it or embellished it because of their own superiority, since the study of art has never taught them to suppress their own instincts.

They do not know themselves that they have transformed the original work, and their simple hearers do not perceive it either. The peasant neither examines nor compares. When Heaven has made him a musician, he sings like the birds, especially the nightingale, whose inspiration is continuous, though the elements of her infinitely varied song are always the same. Besides, the genius of the people is of limitless fertility.¹ It has no need of writing down its productions; it produces without resting, like the earth which it cultivates; it creates incessantly, like the nature which inspires it.

Consuelo had in her heart all the candor, poetry and sensibility necessary to understand popular music, and to love it passionately. In this she was a great artist, and the learned theories which she had fathomed had taken from her genius none of the freshness and sweetness which are the treasures of

¹ If you listen attentively to the players on the bagpipes who are the minstrels in the rural districts of Central France, you will see that they know not less than two hundred compositions of the same kind and the same character, but which are never borrowed from each other; and you will discover that in less than three years this immense repertory is entirely renewed. I recently had the following conversation with one of these wandering minstrels: "You have learned a little music?"—"Certainly; I have learned to play the large bagpipe with the drone (*cornemuse*) and the small bagpipe with keys (*musette*)."—"Where did you take lessons?"—"In the Bourbonnais, in the woods."—"Who was your master?"—"A man of the woods."—"Then you know your notes?"—"Of course."—"In what key do you play?"—"In what key? What do you mean?"—"Are you not playing in *re*?"—"I don't know what you mean by *re*."—"What are your notes called?"—"They are called notes; they have no particular names."—"How do you remember so many different airs?"—"By listening."—"Who composes all these airs?"—"Many people; famous musicians in the woods."—

inspiration and the youth of the soul. She had sometimes said to Anzoletto, unbeknown to Porpora, that she loved certain barcarolles of the fishermen of the Adriatic better than all the learning of Padre Martini and Maestro Durante. Her mother's boleros and hymns were a source of poetical life to her, from which she never wearied of drinking in the secrecy of her cherished memories. What an impression must be produced upon her, therefore, by the musical genius of Bohemia, by the inspiration of this pastoral, warlike, fanatic people, grave and sweet amid the mightiest elements of strength and activity. These were characters striking and wholly new to her. Albert played this music with a rare understanding of the national spirit, and of the energetic and pious feeling which had given it birth. He united to it, in his improvisations, the profound melancholy and harrowing regret which slavery had impressed upon

"Then they make a great many of them?"—"They are always making them; they never stop."—"Is that all they do?"—"They cut wood."—"They are woodcutters?"—"Almost all woodcutters. They say among us that music grows in the woods. It is always there that they find it."—"And is that where you go to seek it?"—"Every year. The small musicians do not go there. They listen to what comes to them on the highways, and repeat it as well as they can. But to get the true accent, it is necessary to go and listen to the woodcutters of the Bourbonnais."—"And how does it come to them?"—"As they are working in the woods, or returning home at evening, or resting on Sundays."—"And you, do you compose?"—"A little, but not much, and it is not worth a great deal. One must be born in the woods, and I belong to the plains. There is no one who is my equal for the accent; but as for inventing, we do not understand it, and we do better not to attempt it."

I wished to make him tell what he meant by the accent. He could not succeed in it, perhaps because he understood it too well and thought me

his personal character and upon that of his people, and this mixture of sadness and boldness, of exaltation and dejection, these hymns of gratitude mingled with cries of distress, were the most complete and profound expressions of both poor Bohemia and poor Albert.

It has been truly said that the object of music is emotion. No other art can awaken in so sublime a manner the human feeling in the heart of man, or paint for the eyes of the soul the splendors of nature, the delights of contemplation, the character of nations, the tumult of their passions and the throes of their sufferings. Regret, hope, terror, meditation, consternation, enthusiasm, faith, doubt, glory, calmness, — all these and yet more music gives us and takes from us again at the will of its genius and according to the extent of our own. It even creates the aspect of things, and without falling into the childishness of effects of sound, or the narrow imitation of actual

unworthy to understand it. He was young, serious, dark as a Calabrian pifferaro, going from festival to festival, playing all day and not having slept for three nights because he had to make six or eight leagues before sunrise to get from one village to another. He was all the better for it, drank jugs of wine enough to fuddle an ox, and did not complain, like Sir Walter Scott's trumpeter, of having "lost his wind." The more he drank, the more grave and haughty he became. He played exceedingly well, and had good reason to be proud of his accent. We noticed that his playing was a perpetual modification of each theme. It was impossible to write a single one of these themes without taking note of each of fifty different versions. There, probably, lay his merit and his art. His replies to my questions have enabled me to recover, I think, the etymology of the name "*Bourree*," which they gave to the dances of this district. *Bourree* is a synonyme for fagot, and the woodcutters of the Bourbonnais have given this name to their musical compositions as Master Adam gave that of "*peés*" to his verses.

noises, it shows us, through a misty veil which magnifies and glorifies them, the external objects amongst which it transports our imagination. Certain hymns will call up before us the huge phantoms of old cathedrals, while they enable us to penetrate the thoughts of the peoples which have built them and are there prostrate, singing their sacred songs. Any one who could perform powerfully and simply the music of the various nations, or any one who could listen to it properly, would not need to go over the earth to see the different races, to go into their buildings, to read their books and to traverse their steppes or mountains, their gardens or deserts. A Jewish hymn well rendered would carry us into a synagogue ; all Scotland is in a true Scottish air, as all Spain is in a truly Spanish air. In this way I have often been in Poland, in Germany, in Naples, in Ireland, in India, and I know these countries and their inhabitants better than if I had studied them for years. It needed but a moment to transport me thither, and to cause me to live their life. It was the essence of this life which I absorbed under the spell of music.

Little by little Consuelo ceased to listen to Albert's violin, and even to hear it. Her whole soul was attentive ; and her senses, closed to direct perceptions, awoke in another world to guide her spirit through unknown spaces, inhabited by new beings. She saw the spectres of the old heroes of Bohemia moving about in a strange chaos, at once horrible and mag-

nificent ; she heard the funeral knell of the convent bells when the terrible Taborites descended from the tops of their fortified mountains, lean, half naked, bloody and savage. Then she saw the angels of death assembling in the clouds, chalice and sword in hand. She saw them hovering in serried ranks over the heads of the lying pontiffs, and pouring upon the accursed earth the cup of divine wrath. She thought she heard the noise of their heavy wings, and the blood of Christ falling in great drops behind them to extinguish the flames lighted by their anger. Now it was a night of dread and darkness, in which she heard the groans and death-rattle of the bodies left lying on the field of battle. Again, it was a dazzling day whose brightness she hardly dared endure, in which she saw the redoubtable blind man passing like a thunderbolt upon his chariot, with his round helmet, his rusty cuirass, and the bloody bandage which covered his eyes. Temples opened of themselves at his approach ; monks fled into the bowels of the earth, carrying off and concealing their relics and their treasures in the folds of their gowns. Then the victors brought worn-out old men, beggars covered with scars like Lazarus ; idiots came singing and laughing like Zdenko ; executioners, soiled with livid blood ; little children with pure hands and angelic faces ; warrior women bearing bundles of pikes and torches of resin, — all sat down about a table, and an angel, radiant and beautiful as those which Albert Durer has painted in his pict-

ures of the Apocalypse, came and presented to their thirsty lips the wooden cup, the chalice of pardon, of rehabilitation and of holy equality.

This angel reappeared in all the visions which were passing at that moment before Consuelo's eyes. When she looked at him carefully, she recognized Satan, the handsomest of the immortals after God, the saddest after Jesus, the proudest of the proud. He dragged behind him the chains which he had broken, and his tawny wings, ruffled and trailing, bore the marks of violence and captivity. He smiled mournfully at the men soiled with crime, and pressed the little children to his breast.

Suddenly it seemed to Consuelo as if Albert's violin was speaking, and saying by the mouth of Satan, "No ; Christ my brother has not loved you more than I love you. It is time that you should know me, and instead of calling me the enemy of the human race, see in me the friend who has supported you in your strife. I am not the demon ; I am the archangel of legitimate revolution and the patron of mighty struggles. Like Christ, I am the God of the poor, the weak and the oppressed. When he promised you the reign of God upon earth, when he announced to you his return among you, he meant to say that after having endured persecution, you would be rewarded by winning liberty and happiness with him and with me. It was together that we were to return, and it is together that we are returning, so joined to one another that we now make but one. It is he, the divine principle, the God of the spirit, who

descended into the darkness where ignorance had cast me, and where I was undergoing, amid the flames of desire and indignation, the same torments which the Scribes and the Pharisees of all ages have caused him to endure upon his cross. Here I am forever with your children ; for he has broken my chains, has quenched my pyre and reconciled me to God and to you. And henceforth subtlety and fear shall no longer be the law and the portion of the weak, but boldness and will. It is he, Jesus, who is the pitiful, the gentle, the tender and the just ; I am just also, but I am the strong, the warlike, the harsh and the persevering. O people ! do you not recognize him who has spoken to you in the secret of your hearts ever since you have existed, and who in all your distresses has consoled you by saying, ‘ Seek your happiness ; do not renounce it ! Happiness is your due ; exact it, and you will have it ! ’ Do you not see all your sufferings upon my brow, and upon my withered limbs the scars of the fetters you have worn ? Drink of the cup which I bring you ; you will find in it my tears mingled with Christ’s and your own ; you will find them as burning and as salutary ! ”

This hallucination filled Consuelo’s heart with grief and pity. She thought she saw and heard the fallen angel weeping and moaning beside her. She saw him tall, pale, beautiful, with his long hair in disorder upon his brow, blasted but still proud, and raised towards heaven. She admired him while she still shuddered from her habit of fearing him, and yet she loved him

with that pious and fraternal love which is inspired by the sight of great misfortunes. It seemed to her that in the communion of the Bohemian brothers, it was to her that he spoke ; that he reproached her gently for her distrust and her fear, and that he drew her to him by a magnetic look which it was impossible to resist. Fascinated, beside herself, she rose and sprang towards him with outstretched arms and bending knees. Albert let fall his violin, which gave out a plaintive sound as it struck the earth, and received the young girl in his arms with a cry of surprise and transport. It was he whom Consuelo had been hearing and seeing, while she dreamed of the rebellious angel ; it was his face, similar in every way to the picture which she had imagined ; it was against his heart that she had just laid her own, as she cried in a smothered voice, "Thine, thine ! angel of sorrow ! Thine and God's forever !"

But hardly had Albert's trembling lips touched hers, when she felt a mortal cold and poignant pains chill and burn her heart and brain by turns. Suddenly snatched from her illusion, she felt so violent a shock in all her being that she believed herself at the point of death ; and tearing herself from the count's arms, she fell back against the bones of the altar, part of them falling over her with a frightful noise. As she saw herself covered with human remains, and looked at Albert, whom she had just pressed in her arms and made in some sort master of her soul and her liberty in a moment of mad excitement, she experienced so

frightful a terror and anguish that she hid her face in her streaming hair and cried, sobbing, "Hence! away from here! Air, light, in the name of Heaven! Oh, my God! take me out of this sepulchre, and restore me to the light of the sun!"

Albert, seeing her pale and delirious, sprang towards her, and wished to take her in his arms to bear her out of the cavern. But in her terror she did not understand him; and springing swiftly up, she fled towards the back of the cave, as chance led her, and without regarding the obstacles or the winding arms of the stream which stretched before her and which in several places exposed her to great danger.

"In God's name," cried Albert, "not that way! Stop! Death is beneath your feet! Wait for me!"

But his cries increased Consuelo's fear. She crossed the brook twice, leaping over it as lightly as a doe, and not yet knowing what she did. At last, in a dark spot, planted with cypress, she stumbled over a mound and fell with outstretched arms upon fine and newly turned earth.

This shock changed the condition of her nerves. A sort of a stupor succeeded to her terror. Suffocating, panting, no longer understanding what she had just experienced, she allowed the count to overtake her and draw near to her. He had followed swiftly after her, and had had presence of mind to snatch hastily, as he passed, one of the torches planted on the rocks, that he might at least give her light amid the windings of the brook, if he did not succeed in

catching her before she came to a spot which he knew to be deep, and towards which she seemed to be rushing. Cast down, overpowered by such sudden and conflicting emotions, the poor young man dared neither speak to her nor lift her up. Nor did she, seated upon the heap of earth which had caused her to stumble, dare to speak to him. Confused, and with downcast eyes, she gazed mechanically at the earth upon which she sat. Suddenly she perceived that this mound had the form and the dimensions of a grave, and that she was in fact sitting upon a new-filled trench, strewn with branches of cypress scarcely yet withered. She rose hastily, and in a new attack of fright, which she could not control, she cried, —

“Oh, Albert ! whom have you buried here ?”

“I have buried here what was dearest to me in the world before I knew you,” replied Albert, displaying the most painful emotion. “If it is a sacrilege, as I committed it in a moment of delirium, and intending to fulfil a sacred duty, God will pardon me. I will tell you by and by what soul dwelt in the body which lies here. You are too agitated now, and you need to return to the open air. Come, Consuelo ; let us leave this spot, where you made me in a moment the happiest and the most miserable of men !”

“Oh, yes,” she cried, “let us leave here ! I do not know what vapors rise from the bosom of the earth ; but I feel as if I should die, and my reason is leaving me.”

They went out together, without saying a word

more. Albert walked in advance, stopping and lowering his torch at every stone, that his companion might see and avoid it. When he wished to open the door of the cell, a recollection apparently foreign to the disposition of mind in which she was, but connected with it by an artistic instinct, returned to Consuelo.

"Albert," she said, "you have forgotten your violin near the spring. I could never consent that this admirable instrument, which has caused me emotions hitherto unknown, should be left to certain destruction in this damp spot."

Albert made a gesture which signified how little he cared henceforth for anything but Consuelo. But she insisted.

"It caused me great pain," said she, "and yet" —

"If it has only caused you pain, leave it to rot," he replied bitterly; "I will never touch it again in my life. Ah, I long for its destruction!"

"I should not speak truth if I said that," returned Consuelo, recovering a feeling of respect for the count's musical genius. "The emotion was too great for my strength, that is all, and the delight changed to suffering. Go and get it, my friend; I will place it carefully in its box myself, and wait until I have courage to take it out again and place it in your hands and listen to it once more."

Consuelo was moved by the look of gratitude which the count gave her when he received this hope. He

returned to the grotto to obey her, and when she was alone she reproached herself for her foolish fright and her dreadful suspicions. She recollected, trembling and blushing, the feverish impulse which had thrown her into his arms ; but she could not help admiring the modest respect and the chaste timidity of this man who adored her, but who had not dared to profit by such a circumstance to say even a word of love to her. The sadness which she saw in his face and the weariness of his laggard step showed clearly that he had not conceived any audacious hope either for the present or the future. She was grateful to him for so great a delicacy, and resolved to soften by the kindest words the farewell which they were about to bid one another on leaving the grotto.

But the memory of Zdenko, like an avenging shade, was to pursue her to the end and accuse Albert in spite of herself. As she approached the door, her eyes fell upon an inscription in Bohemian, all save one word of which she understood, for she knew it by heart. A hand which could only be Zdenko's had written in chalk upon the deep, black door, "May he who has been wronged —— you." One word was unintelligible to Consuelo, and this circumstance caused her a lively anxiety. Albert returned, shut up his violin, without her having the courage or even the thought to help him, as she had promised. She recovered all her impatience to be gone out of the cavern. As he was turning the key with difficulty in the rusty lock, she could not help putting her finger

upon the mysterious word, and she looked at her host questioningly.

"That means," replied Albert, with a sort of calmness, "that the misunderstood angel, the friend of the unfortunate, he of whom we were just speaking, Consuelo" —

"Yes, Satan ; I know that, and the rest?"

"May Satan pardon you."

"Pardon what?" asked she, turning pale.

"If sorrow needs to gain pardon," replied the count, with melancholy serenity, "I have a long prayer to make."

They entered the gallery, and did not break silence till they reached the Monk's Cave. But when the light of outside day fell through the foliage in bluish rays upon the count's face, Consuelo saw two streams of tears silently flowing down his cheeks. She was moved by it ; and yet when he drew near with a timid air to carry her to the entrance she preferred rather to wet her feet in this brackish water than to let him lift her in his arms. She made a pretext of his fatigued and prostrated condition, and was already dipping her delicate shoes into the water, when Albert said to her, as he extinguished his torch, —

"Farewell, Consuelo ! I see by your aversion to me that I must return to everlasting night, and, like a spectre raised by you for a moment, go back to my tomb after having succeeded only in frightening you."

"No, your life belongs to me," cried Consuelo, turning about and stopping him. "You swore to me

never to return to that cavern without me, and you have no right to break your oath."

"Why do you wish to lay the burden of human life upon the ghost of a man? A hermit is only the shade of a mortal, and he who is not loved is alone everywhere and with every one."

"Albert, Albert, you are rending my heart! Come, carry me out. It seems to me that in broad daylight I may at last see clearly into my own destiny."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ALBERT obeyed her, and when they began to descend from the base of the Schreckenstein towards the lower valleys, Consuelo did in fact feel her agitation growing less.

"Forgive me for the pain I inflicted on you," she said, leaning lightly on his arm; "I am very certain now that I had an attack of madness in the grotto."

"Why do you recall it to me, Consuelo? I should never have spoken to you of it; I know well that you would like to efface it from your memory. I, too, must succeed in forgetting it."

"Dear friend, I do not wish to forget it, but to ask your pardon for it. If I were to tell you the strange vision that I saw as I listened to your Bohemian airs, you would see that I was out of my senses when I caused you such a surprise and such a fright. You cannot believe that I wished to sport with your reason and your repose. Heaven is my witness that I would still give my life for you!"

"I know that you do not care for life, Consuelo, and I feel that I should care infinitely for it if" —

"Go on."

"If I were loved as I love."

"Albert, I love you as much as it is given me to

love. I would love you as you deserve, no doubt, if" —

"Do you go on now."

"If insurmountable obstacles did not make it a crime."

"And what are these obstacles? I seek them in vain in your surroundings; I can only find them in your heart, in your memories, no doubt!"

"Do not speak of my memories; they are odious, and I would rather die at once than live the past over again. But your rank in the world, your fortune, the opposition and indignation of your relatives, how do you suppose I can have the courage to brave all these? I possess nothing in the world but my pride and my unselfishness; what would be left me if I sacrificed them?"

"My love and your own would be left me, if you loved me. I know that you do not, and I only ask a little pity. How could you be humiliated by granting me the alms of a little happiness? Which one of us would be on his knees before the other? How could my fortune degrade you? Could we not cast it quickly to the poor, if it were as burdensome to you as to me? Do you not suppose that I long ago made a firm resolution to employ it as beseems my beliefs and my tastes; that is to say, by ridding myself of it, when the loss of my father shall add the pain of inheritance to the pain of separation? Are you afraid of being rich? Very well; I have made a vow of poverty. Are you afraid of being distinguished by

my name? It is a false name, and the true one is proscribed. I shall not resume it, for that would be an insult to my father's memory ; but in the obscurity in which I shall hide myself, no one would be dazzled by it, and you could not reproach me with that, I swear to you. Finally, as for the opposition of my family. Oh, if that were the only obstacle ! Tell me that there is no other, and you will see ! ”

“It is the greatest of all, the only one which all my devotion, all my gratitude to you could not remove.”

“It is not true, Consuelo ! Dare you swear that what you say is true ? That is not the only obstacle.”

Consuelo hesitated. She had never lied, and yet she would have liked to repair the ill which she had done to her friend, who had saved her life and who had watched over her for several months with the solicitude of a tender and intelligent mother. She had hoped to soften her refusal by bringing up the obstacles which she believed to be indeed insurmountable. But Albert's repeated questions disturbed her, and her own heart was a labyrinth in which she lost herself, for she could not tell with certainty whether she loved or hated this strange man, towards whom a mysterious and powerful sympathy impelled her, while an invincible dread and something which resembled aversion caused her to tremble at the very idea of a betrothal.

It seemed to her at that moment that she hated

Anzoleto. Could it be otherwise when she compared him, with his brutal selfishness and vulgar ambition, his cowardice and perfidies, to this Albert, so generous, humane, pure and great in all the sublimest and most romantic virtues? The only cloud which could obscure the conclusion of the comparison was the attempt upon Zdenko's life, which she could not help presuming. But was not this suspicion a disease of her imagination, a nightmare which might be driven away by a moment's explanation? She resolved to try, and, pretending to be preoccupied and not to have heard Albert's last question, said, stopping to look at a peasant who was passing at a little distance, —

“Good heaven! I thought I saw Zdenko!”

Albert shuddered, dropped Consuelo's arm, which he held beneath his own, and made several steps forward. Then he stopped and returned to her saying, —

“What a mistake, Consuelo! That man has not the least resemblance to” —

He could not find courage to pronounce Zdenko's name; his face was violently agitated.

“Yet you thought so yourself for a moment,” said Consuelo, who was looking at him attentively.

“I am very near-sighted, and I ought to have recollected that it is impossible to meet him.”

“Impossible? Then Zdenko is far from here?”

“So far that you have no longer anything to fear from his madness.”

“Can you not tell me the cause of this sudden

hatred of me, after the evidences which he gave of affection for me?"

"I have already told you that it was a dream which he had the night before you descended into the grotto. He saw you in that dream accompanying me to the altar, where you consented to plight me your troth; and there you began to sing our old Bohemian hymns in a powerful voice which shook all the church. While you were singing, he saw me turn pale and sink beneath the pavement until I lay dead in the tomb of my ancestors. Then he saw you hastily throw aside your marriage wreath and dance over my grave, singing incomprehensible things in an unknown tongue, and with all the signs of the most frantic and cruel joy. Filled with rage, he cast himself upon you, but you had already vanished in vapor, and he awoke bathed in sweat and filled with rage. He wakened me also, for his cries and curses shook the roof of his cell. I had great trouble in persuading him to relate his dream, and still greater in preventing him from seeing in it a true indication of my destiny. I could not easily convince him, for I was myself under the influence of a diseased mental excitement, and I had never before attempted to dissuade him when I saw him putting trust in his visions and dreams. Still, I had reason to believe, during the day which followed this night of excitement, that he did not remember it, or attached no importance to it, for he did not again allude to it; and when I begged him to go and speak to you about me, he made no open resistance. He

did not think that you would ever have either the idea or the power of coming to seek me where I was, and his madness only revived when he saw you undertake it. At any rate, he never revealed his hatred for you until we met him as we were returning through the subterranean passage. It was then that he told me, laconically, in Bohemian, that his intention and his resolution were to rid me of you (that was his expression) and to destroy you the first time he met you alone, because you were the scourge of my life, and my death was written in your eyes. Forgive me for repeating to you the words of his ravings, and understand now why I had to send him away from you and from me. Let us not speak further of it, I beg of you ; it is a very painful subject of conversation. I loved Zdenko like another self. His madness had become so assimilated and identified with my own that we had spontaneously the same thoughts and visions, and even the same physical sufferings. He was more simple, and, therefore, more of a poet than I ; his temper was more even, and the phantoms which seemed to me frightful and threatening appeared to him gentle and sad, because of his organization, which was more tender and serene than mine. The great difference that existed between us was the irregularity of my attacks and the continuity of his enthusiasm. While I was by turns a victim to madness and a cold and appalled spectator of my own misery, he lived constantly in a sort of trance in which external objects assumed symbolic forms, and his derangement was

always so sweet and affectionate that in my lucid moments (the most painful for me, assuredly) I had need of the peaceful and ingenious insanity of Zdenko to revive me and reconcile me to life."

"Dear friend," said Consuelo, "you must hate me, and I hate myself for having robbed you of this precious and devoted friend. But has not his exile lasted long enough? He is now, no doubt, cured of a passing attack of violence."

"He is cured—probably!" said Albert, with a strange smile full of bitterness.

"Very well," replied Consuelo, who was endeavoring to repel the idea of Zdenko's death, "why do you not recall him? I should not be afraid to see him again, I assure you, and between us we could cause him to forget his prejudices against me."

"Do not speak thus, Consuelo," said Albert dejectedly. "His return is impossible. I sacrificed my best friend,—him who was my companion, servant and support, a provident and laborious mother and a simple child, ignorant and submissive, who ministered to all my wants, to all my innocent and melancholy pleasures, who defended me against myself in my fits of despair, and who employed strength or craft to prevent my leaving my cell when he saw me incapable of preserving my own dignity and leading my own life in the world of the living and in the society of other men. I made this sacrifice without looking back and without remorse, because it was my duty; because by braving the dangers of the cistern and

by restoring me to reason and to the consciousness of my duty, you had become more precious, more sacred, to me than Zdenko himself."

"That is an error, Albert, perhaps a blasphemy. The courage of a moment could never be compared to a lifetime of devotion."

"Do not believe that a selfish and brutal love counselled me to do as I have done. I could have stifled such a love in my breast and shut myself up in my cavern with Zdenko rather than break the heart and the life of the best of men. But the voice of God had spoken clearly. I had resisted the attraction which was mastering me ; I had fled from you ; I wished to see you no more, so long as the dreams and presentiments which made me hope for you as the angel of my safety were not realized. Before the disorder brought into Zdenko's pious and gentle organization by the lying dream, he shared in my aspirations towards you, in my fears, hopes and religious desires. Unfortunate being ! He misunderstood you on the very day you revealed yourself. The heavenly light which had always illumined the mysterious regions of his mind was suddenly extinguished, and God condemned him by sending him the spirit of rage and fury. I, too, had to abandon him, for you appeared to me wrapped in a ray of glory ; you descended to me upon the wings of a miracle, and found, to open my eyes, words which your calm spirit and artist's education could not have permitted you to study and prepare. Pity and char-

ity inspired you, and under their miraculous influence you told me what I needed to hear to know and comprehend human life."

"What did I say to you that was so wise and strong? Really, Albert, I do not know."

"Nor I; but God himself was in the sound of your voice and in the serenity of your look. From you I learned in a moment what I should not have found out by myself in my whole life. I knew before that my existence was an expiation, a martyrdom; and I sought to accomplish my destiny in darkness, solitude, tears, indignation, study, asceticism and maceration. You revealed to me another life, another martyrdom,—all of patience, gentleness, toleration and devotion. The duties which you pointed out to me simply and modestly, beginning with those towards my family, I had forgotten, and my family, by an excess of kindness, had allowed me to be ignorant of my crimes. I have made reparation for them, thanks to you, and from the very first day I have known by the calmness which filled my heart that this was all that God exacted of me for the present. I know that it is not all, and I am waiting for him to reveal himself concerning the remainder of my existence. But I have confidence now, because I have found an oracle which I can consult. It is you, Consuelo! Providence has given you power over me, and I shall not rebel against its decrees by trying to escape from it. I could not hesitate, therefore, for an instant between the superior power

endowed with the gift of regenerating me and the poor, passive creature who, until then, had only shared my distresses and submitted to my storms."

"You are speaking of Zdenko? But how do you know that God had not destined me to cure him too? You see that I already had some power over him, since I succeeded in quieting him with a word, when his hand was raised to kill me."

"O God! It is true, I lacked faith, I was afraid. I knew Zdenko's oaths. He had made, in spite of me, that of living only for me, and he had kept it all my life, in my absence, as before and since my return. When he swore to destroy you, I did not even think that it was possible to change his determination, and I took the course of offending him, of banishing, breaking, destroying him."

"Destroying him? Good heaven, Albert! What do you mean by that? Where is Zdenko?"

"You ask me as God asked Cain, — 'Where is thy brother?' "

"O God! You have not killed him, Albert?"

As Consuelo uttered this terrible word, she clung tightly to Albert's arm and looked at him with fright mingled with sorrowful pity. She recoiled terrified at the cold and haughty expression on his pale face, which grief sometimes seemed to petrify.

"I have not killed him," he replied, "and yet I certainly took his life. Dare you reproach me with it, you for whom I would perhaps kill my own father in the same way — you for whom I would brave any

remorse and break the dearest ties or the most sacred existences? If I have preferred, to the dread of seeing you butchered by a madman, the regret and repentance which are devouring me, have you so little pity in your heart as to be always placing this grief beneath my eyes, and to reproach me with the greatest sacrifice it has been in my power to make for you? Ah, you, too, have moments of cruelty! Then cruelty cannot be banished from the breast of any of the human race!"

There was so much solemnity in this reproach, the first which Albert had dared to make to Consuelo, that she was filled with dread, and felt more than ever before the terror which he inspired. A sort of humiliation, childish, perhaps, but inherent to the heart of woman, succeeded to the gentle pride which she could not but feel as Albert portrayed his passionate veneration of her. She felt mortified and misunderstood, no doubt, for she had sought to discover his secret only with the intention, or at least the desire, of responding to his love if he could justify himself. At the same time she saw that in Albert's idea she was to blame; for if he had killed Zdenko, the only person in the world who would not have had the right to condemn him irrevocably would have been her, whose life had compelled the sacrifice of another life, once infinitely precious to the unfortunate Albert.

Consuelo could not reply; she wished to speak of something else, but tears cut off her words. When he saw them flow, the repentant Albert wished to humble

himself in his turn ; but she begged him never to recur to so trying a subject, and promised him, with a sort of bitter consternation, never again to pronounce a name which aroused in her as in him the most painful emotions. The rest of their walk was constrained and unpleasant. They tried in vain to speak of other things. Consuelo did not know what she said or what she heard. Albert, however, appeared calm, like Abraham or Brutus after the accomplishment of the sacrifice ordained by cruel fate. This sad but profound tranquillity, considering the weight upon his heart, resembled a lingering madness, and Consuelo could only justify her friend by remembering that he was mad. If in an open struggle against a robber he had killed his adversary to save her, she would have found in it only another motive of gratitude and perhaps of admiration for his strength and courage. But this mysterious murder, committed no doubt in the darkness of the cavern ; this grave, dug in the place of prayer, and his savage silence after such an occurrence ; the stoical fanaticism with which he had dared to take her into the grotto and abandon himself to the charms of music, — all this was horrible, and Consuelo felt that love for this man could never visit her heart. “When can he have committed this murder?” she asked herself ; “for three months I have not seen upon his brow a furrow deep enough to suggest remorse. Has he not had drops of blood upon his hand some day when I have given him my own? Horror ! he must be of stone or ice, or else love me to savageness !

And I, who so desired to inspire a limitless love, I, who regretted so bitterly that I was loved feebly,—this is the love which heaven reserved for me as a compensation !”

Then she began to wonder when Albert could have performed his horrible sacrifice. She thought that it must have been during the severe illness which had made her indifferent to external events ; and when she recalled the tender and delicate attentions which Albert had bestowed upon her, she could not reconcile the two sides of a man so unlike himself and all other men.

Lost in this sombre revery, she took with a trembling hand and preoccupied air the flowers which Albert was accustomed to gather for her upon the way, for he knew that she was fond of them. She did not even think of leaving him to return to the castle alone and conceal the long interview which they had had. Whether Albert did not think of it either, or whether he conceived that he needed no longer to dissemble with his family, he did not recall it to her, and at the gate of the castle they found themselves face to face with the canoness. Consuelo (and, no doubt, Albert also) saw for the first time anger and disdain inflame the countenance of this woman, whose goodness of heart ordinarily prevented her from being ugly in spite of her thinness and deformity.

“ It is high time you were back, young lady,” she said to Porporina in a voice trembling with indignation. “ We were greatly disturbed about Count Albert.

His father, who was unwilling to breakfast without him, desired to have a conversation with him this morning, which you have seen fit to cause him to forget ; and as for yourself, there is a young man in the drawing-room who says that he is your brother, and is waiting for you with an impatience anything but polite."

After saying these strange words, poor Wenceslawa, frightened at her own courage, turned her back and ran to her room, where she coughed and wept for more than an hour.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"My aunt is in a very singular frame of mind," said Albert to Consuelo as he went up the steps with her. "I beg you to pardon her, my friend ; be assured that this very day she will change her manners and her language."

"My brother?" said Consuelo, stupefied at the news which had just been told her, and not hearing what the young count said.

"I did not know that you had a brother," replied Albert, who had been more struck by his aunt's acerbity than by this incident. "It is no doubt a happiness for you to see him again, dear Consuelo, and I am glad."

"Do not be glad, count," said Consuelo, suddenly seized with a painful presentiment. "There is perhaps a great sorrow in store for me" —

She paused, trembling, for she had been on the point of asking him for advice and protection. But she feared to bind herself too strongly to him, and not daring either to receive or to shun him who had secured entrance to the house by a lie, she felt her knees quaking, and leaned against the balustrade on the topmost step of the flight.

"Are you afraid of any disagreeable news of your

family?" said Albert, whose anxiety began to be aroused.

"I have no family," replied Consuelo, endeavoring to resume her way.

She nearly said that she had no brother, but a vague dread restrained her. But as they passed through the dining-room, she heard upon the floor the steps of the traveller, who was walking up and down impatiently. By an involuntary impulse she drew closer to the young count, and pressed his arm as she intertwined her own with it, as if to seek refuge in his love upon the approach of the sufferings which she foresaw.

Albert was struck by this movement, and it filled him with a mortal dread.

"Do not go in without me," he said to her in a low voice; "I feel, from presentiments which have never deceived me, that this brother is your enemy and mine. I am cold, I am afraid, as if I were about to be compelled to hate some one."

Consuelo freed her arm, which Albert was pressing tightly against his breast. She trembled as she thought that he might perhaps entertain one of those singular ideas, or adopt one of those implacable resolutions of which Zdenko's supposed death was a deplorable example to her.

"Let us separate here," she said in German (for from the neighboring room everything could be overheard). "I have nothing to fear for the moment, but if the future threatens, trust me, Albert, I will turn to you."

Albert yielded with intense reluctance. He feared to be lacking in delicacy, and so did not dare to disobey her, but he could not make up his mind to leave the room. Consuelo, who understood his hesitation, closed both doors of the drawing-room as she went in, so that he could neither see nor hear what might be done or said there.

Anzoletto (for it was he, as she had guessed but too easily from his boldness and known but too well by his step) had prepared to meet her boldly with a brotherly embrace in the presence of witnesses. When he saw her come in alone, pale, but cold and severe, he lost all his courage and threw himself at her feet, stammering broken words. He did not need to feign joy and affection. He felt both of these sentiments violently and truly, when he saw her whom he had never ceased to love in spite of his treason. He burst into weeping, and as she would not allow him to take her hands, he covered the hem of her gown with tears and kisses. Consuelo was not prepared to find him thus. For four months she had thought of him as he had appeared on the night of their separation,—bitter, ironical, contemptible and hateful above all men. This very morning she had seen him passing with a careless manner and an indifference which was almost cynical. Yet here he was upon his knees, humble, repentant, bathed in tears, as in the stormy days of their passionate reconciliations, handsomer than ever, for his travelling-dress, though somewhat vulgar, was marvellously becoming, and the tan gained in his

journey had given a more manly expression to his admirable features.

Throbbing like a dove which a vulture has just seized, she was obliged to sit down and hide her face in her hands to escape from the fascination of his look. This movement, which Anzoletto took for shame, emboldened him, and the return of evil thoughts quickly spoiled the simple outburst of his first transport. Anzoletto, when he fled from Venice and the disgust which he felt there as a punishment for his faults, had had no other idea than to seek his fortune ; but at the same time he had always preserved the desire and the hope of finding his dear Consuelo. So brilliant a talent could not long remain hidden, in his opinion, and he had nowhere neglected to make inquiries, by questioning his innkeepers, his guides or the travellers whom he met. At Vienna he had found some distinguished persons of his own nation to whom he had confessed his escapade and his flight. They had advised him to wait in some spot more distant from Venice until Count Zustiniani had forgotten or forgiven his behavior, and promising him to labor to that end, they had given him letters of recommendation for Prague, Dresden and Berlin. As he passed before the Castle of the Giants, Anzoletto had not thought of questioning his guide, but after an hour's rapid ride, when they had slackened their pace to breathe their horses, he had renewed the conversation by asking him for details concerning the country and its inhabitants. Naturally the guide

had spoken to him of the lords of Rudolstadt, of their manner of living and of the eccentricities of Count Albert, whose insanity was no longer a secret from any one, especially since Dr. Wetzeliuss had taken a cordial aversion to him. The guide did not fail to add, to complete the gossip of the neighborhood, that Count Albert had just capped the climax by refusing to marry his noble cousin, the beautiful Baroness Amelia of Rudolstadt, to devote himself to an adventuress, moderately handsome, but with whom everybody fell in love when she sang, because she had an extraordinary voice.

These two circumstances were too applicable to Consuelo for our traveller not to ask the name of the adventuress, and when he learned that she was called Porporina he no longer doubted. He turned about instantly, and after rapidly improvising a pretext and a title under which he could secure admission to the well-guarded castle, he extracted some further slanders from his guide. This man's tattle had made him certain that Consuelo was the young count's mistress, while waiting to become his wife, for she had bewitched the whole family, it was said, and instead of driving her away as she deserved, they paid regard and attentions to her which had never been paid to Baroness Amelia.

These details stimulated Anzoletto quite as much as his real attachment for Consuelo, and perhaps more. He had often sighed for the return of that peaceful life which she had made for him. He had felt that in

losing her advice and direction he had lost or endangered for a long time the success of his musical career ; in short, he was strongly drawn to her by a love which was at once selfish, profound and invincible. But to all this was now joined the temptation to his vanity of disputing the possession of Consuelo with her rich and noble lover, of snatching her from a brilliant marriage and of having it said in the neighborhood and in the world that this girl, so well provided for, had preferred a life of adventure with him to becoming a countess and the mistress of a castle. He therefore amused himself by causing his guide to repeat that Consuelo ruled like a queen at Reisenburg, and flattered himself with the childish hope of having this same man say to all travellers who should come after him that a handsome young stranger had galloped up to the inhospitable manor of the giants, that he had come, seen and conquered, and that a few hours, or a few days, later he had left it again, bearing away the pearl of singers from the high and mighty lord, the Count of Rudolstadt.

At this thought he plunged his spurs into the side of his horse and laughed in such a way that the guide thought him madder than Count Albert himself.

The canoness received him with distrust, but did not dare to turn him away, in the hope that he might perhaps carry off his pretended sister. He learned from her that Consuelo was out walking, and it vexed him. They gave him breakfast, and he questioned the servants. Only one knew a little Italian, and he

said quite innocently that he had seen the signora on the mountain with the young count. Anzoleto was afraid of finding Consuelo haughty and cold at first. He said to himself, that if she was as yet only the virtuous betrothed of the son of the house, she would have the dignified bearing of a person proud of her position ; but that if she was already his mistress, she would be less sure of her position, and tremble before an old friend who could ruin her prospects. Innocent, her conquest was difficult and therefore more glorious ; corrupted, it was easier ; but in either case there was reason to try and to hope.

Anzoleto was too acute not to perceive the annoyance and anxiety which Porporina's long walk with her nephew caused the canoness. As he did not see Count Christian, he might well believe that the guide was misinformed, that the family regarded the young count's love for the adventuress with dread and displeasure, and that Consuelo would hang her head before her former lover.

After waiting four weary hours, Anzoleto, who had time to make many reflections, and whose morals were not pure enough for him to augur well from such circumstances, considered it certain that so long a *tete-a-tete* between Consuelo and his rival was sufficient proof of an intimacy without reserve. He was, therefore, all the bolder, all the more determined to wait without being disheartened, and after the irresistible emotion caused by the first sight of her, he thought it certain, when he saw her become

agitated and fall silent upon a chair, that he might dare everything. His tongue, therefore, became quickly loosed. He accused himself for everything in the past, humbled himself hypocritically, wept as much as he chose, told of his remorse and his torments, depicting them as more poetic than disgusting distractions had allowed him to feel them, and finally implored pardon with all the eloquence of a Venetian and a consummate actor.

Moved at first by the sound of his voice, and more frightened by her own weakness than by the power of his fascinations, Consuelo, who had also been making reflections for four months, quickly recovered enough coolness to recognize in these protestations and this passionate eloquence all that she had often heard in Venice during the last days of their unhappy union. She was wounded to see that he repeated the same oaths and the same prayers, as if nothing had happened since those quarrels, when she was so far from suspecting Anzoletto's odious conduct. Indignant at such audacity and such fine speeches, where there should have been nothing but the silence of shame and tears of repentance, she cut short his declamation by rising and replying coldly, —

“That is enough, Anzoletto ; I long since forgave you and am no longer angry with you. Indignation has given place to pity, and I have forgotten your wrongs along with my own sufferings. We have nothing more to say to each other. I thank you for the good impulse which has caused you to interrupt your

journey to become reconciled to me. Your pardon was granted in advance, as you see. Farewell, therefore, and go on your way."

"I depart! Leave you, lose you again!" cried Anzoleto, really frightened. "No, I would rather have you tell me to kill myself at once. No, never can I endure to live without you. I cannot, Consuelo; I have tried, and I know that it is useless. Where you are not, there is nothing for me. My detestable ambition, my miserable vanity, to which I wished in vain to sacrifice my love, constitute my torture and do not give me a moment's pleasure. Your image follows me everywhere; the memory of our happiness, so pure, so chaste and delicious (where can you ever find its like yourself?), is always before my eyes; all the chimeras with which I wish to surround myself cause me the deepest disgust. O Consuelo! remember our beautiful nights in Venice, our boat, our stars and endless songs, your good lessons and our long kisses, your little bed, where I slept alone while you said your rosary upon the terrace! Did I not love you then? Is not that man capable of loving who always respected you, even in your sleep, shut up alone with you? If I have been infamous with others, have I not always been an angel with you? And God knows how hard it was! Oh, do not forget all that! You said that you loved me so dearly, and you have forgotten it. And I who am an ingrate, a monster, a coward, have not been able to forget it for a moment. And I will not give it up, though you renounce it

without regret or effort ! But you never loved me, though you are a saint ; and I adore you, though I am a demon."

"It is possible," replied Consuelo, struck by the accent of truth with which these words were uttered, "that you have a sincere regret for this happiness, sullied and lost by you. It is a punishment which you must bear and of which I ought not to relieve you. Happiness corrupted you, Anzoleto. You need a little suffering to purify you. Go and remember me, if this pain is salutary for you. If not, forget me, as I forget you, — I who have nothing to expiate nor to repair."

"Ah, you have a heart of iron !" cried Anzoleto, surprised and offended at so much calmness. "But do not think that you can drive me away thus ! It is possible that my arrival disturbs you and that my presence is a burden to you. I know very well that you wish to sacrifice the memory of our love to the ambition of rank and fortune. But it shall not be so ! I fasten myself to you, and if I lose you it will not be without a struggle. I will recall the past to you, and I will do it before all your new friends, if you compel me. I will repeat the oaths which you made at the bedside of your dying mother, and which you renewed a hundred times upon her tomb and in churches where we went to kneel beside each other in the crowd, to listen to the beautiful music and whisper to one another. I will recall humbly to you, alone, prostrate before you, things which you will not refuse to hear ; and if you

do, woe to us both ! I will speak before your new lover what he does not know. For they know nothing about you — not even that you have been an actress. Well, I will tell it to them, and we will see whether the noble Count Albert will recover his reason to struggle for you with a comedian, your friend and equal, your betrothed, nay, your lover ! Ah, do not drive me to despair, Consuelo ! or” —

“Threats ? At last I recognize you, Anzoleto,” said the indignant young girl. “Well, I like you better so, and I thank you for unmasking. Yes, thank heaven ! I shall no longer have regret or pity for you. I see how much gall there is in your heart, how much baseness in your character, how much hatred in your love. Go on ! Satisfy your anger ! You will do me a service. But unless you have become as hardened in calumny as you are in insult, you can say nothing for which I shall have to blush.”

As she said this, she went to the door, opened it and was about to go out, when she found herself face to face with Count Christian. At the appearance of the venerable man, who came in with an affable and majestic manner, after kissing Consuelo’s hand, Anzoleto, who had sprung forward to restrain the latter, with or without her leave, recoiled abashed and lost the boldness of his manner.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"DEAR signora," said the old count, "pardon me for not affording your brother a better reception. I had given orders not to be disturbed, because I had unusual occupations this morning, and they obeyed me too well in allowing me to remain ignorant of the arrival of a guest who is welcome in this house to me as to all my family. Be assured, sir," he said, speaking to Anzoleto, "that I have great pleasure in receiving beneath my roof so near a relative of our beloved Porporina. I beg that you will remain here and pass as long a time as is agreeable to you. I presume that after so long a separation you have many things to say to one another and great happiness in being together. I trust that you will not fear to trespass by enjoying at your leisure a pleasure in which I share."

Contrary to his custom, old Christian spoke with ease to a stranger. His timidity with the gentle Consuelo had long since vanished, and that day his face seemed brightened by a ray of life more brilliant than usual—such as the sun spreads over the horizon at the hour of its setting. Anzoleto was abashed before the majesty which uprightness and peace of mind bestow upon the brow of a venerable old man. He knew how to bow low enough before great lords, but

he hated and mocked at them inwardly. He had had but too good reason to despise them in the fine world in which he had lived for some time. He had never before seen a dignity so nobly borne or so cordial a politeness as those of the old master of Reisenburg. He became embarrassed as he thanked him, and almost repented of having stolen by an imposture the paternal welcome which he was receiving. He was afraid, above all, that Consuelo might unmask him by declaring to the count that he was not her brother. He felt that at that moment it would not have been in his power to brazen it out and endeavor to avenge himself.

"I am very much touched by your goodness," replied Consuelo, after a moment's reflection, "but my brother, who fully appreciates it, will not have the happiness of profiting by it. Pressing business calls him to Prague, and he has just this moment bidden me farewell."

"That is impossible! You have hardly seen each other," said the count.

"He lost several hours waiting for me," replied she, "and now his moments are counted. He knows very well," she added, looking at her pretended brother significantly, "that he cannot remain here a moment longer."

This cold persistence restored to Anzoletto all the boldness of his character and all the self-possession of his part.

"Come what pleases the devil — God, I mean!"

said he correcting himself, "I cannot leave my sister so abruptly as her reason and prudence dictate. I know of no business interest which is worth a moment of happiness; and since you so generously allow me, count, I accept with gratitude — I remain! My engagements in Prague will be filled a little later, that is all."

"You speak very lightly," replied Consuelo, offended. "There are affairs in which honor speaks louder than interest" —

"I speak like a brother," returned Anzoleta, "and you always speak like a queen, my good little sister."

"You speak like a good young man," added the old count, holding out his hand to Anzoleta. "I know of no business which cannot be put off until the morrow. It is true that I have always been reproached for my indolence, but I have always observed that one was worse off from haste than from reflection. As an instance, my dear Porporina, I have had for several days — I might say weeks — a request to make you, and I have put it off until now. I think that I have done wisely, and that the moment has arrived. Can you grant me to-day the interview which I was coming to ask of you when I heard of your brother's arrival? It seems to me that this happy circumstance is most timely, and that perhaps his presence at the conversation which I wish to have with you would not be improper."

"I am always and at all hours at your lordship's orders," replied Consuelo. "As to my brother, he is

a boy whom I do not hastily admit into my personal affairs " —

"I know that very well," replied Anzoleto brazenly, "but since the count authorizes it, I need no other permission than his to take part in the conference."

"You will be good enough to allow me to judge what is befitting you and me," replied Consuelo haughtily. "I am ready to follow you to your apartment, my lord, and to listen to you with respect."

"You are very severe with this good young man, who has such a frank and joyous expression," said the count smiling. Then turning to Anzoleto, he added, "Do not be impatient, my child, your turn will come ; what I have to say to your sister cannot be concealed from you, and soon I hope that she will allow me to admit you to our confidence."

Anzoleto had the impertinence to reply to the old man's frank gayety by retaining his hand between his own, as if he wished to fasten himself to him. He had not the good taste to understand that he ought at least to go out of the drawing-room to spare the count the trouble of leaving it himself. When he found himself alone there, he stamped his foot with anger, fearing that this young girl, who had become so perfectly mistress of herself, would ruin his plans and have him turned away in spite of all his cleverness. He wished to slip about the house and listen at every door. He went out of the drawing-room with this design, wandered in the garden for a few

moments, and then ventured into the corridors, pretending, when he met a servant, to be admiring the fine architecture of the castle. But on three different occasions he saw passing at a little distance a singularly grave person, clad in black, whose attention he did not care to attract. It was Albert, who did not appear to observe him, but who, nevertheless, did not lose sight of him. Anzoletto, seeing him a head taller than himself, and noticing the serious beauty of his features, realized that his rival, the madman of Reisenberg, was not so contemptible in any respect as he had supposed. He therefore returned to the drawing-room and tried his fine voice in that vast apartment, carelessly running his fingers over the keys of the clavichord.

“My daughter,” said Count Christian to Consuelo, after conducting her to his study, where he placed a sumptuous easy-chair for her, while he seated himself beside her upon a camp-stool, “I have a favor to ask of you, and I do not know by what right I can do it before you understand my intentions. Can I flatter myself that my white hair, my tender esteem for you and the friendship of the noble Porpora, your adopted father, will give you enough confidence in me for you to consent to open your heart to me unreservedly?”

Touched, and yet a little frightened, by this exordium, Consuelo raised the old man’s hand to her lips, and replied to him warmly, —

“Yes, count ; I respect and love you as if I had the honor of having you for my father, and I can reply

without fear and without reserve to all your questions, in so far as they concern me personally."

"I shall not ask you for anything else, dear child, and I thank you for this promise. Believe me as incapable of abusing it as I believe you incapable of breaking it."

"I believe it, count ; be good enough to speak."

"Well, my child," said the old man, with a simple and encouraging curiosity, "what is your name?"

"I have no family name," replied Consuelo, without hesitating ; "my mother had no other than Rosmunda. At my baptism I was called Mary of Consolation. I never knew my father."

"But you know his name?"

"Not at all, my lord ; I have never even heard him mentioned."

"Has Maestro Porpora adopted you? Has he given you his name by a legal act?"

"No, my lord. That is not done among artists, and is not necessary. My generous master owns nothing and has nothing to leave. As for my name, it is very unimportant to my position in the world whether I bear it by virtue of custom or law. If I justify it by my talent, I shall have a right to it ; if not, I shall have received an honor of which I am unworthy."

The count was silent for some moments, and then resumed, taking Consuelo's hand : —

"The noble frankness with which you reply to me gives me a still higher opinion of you," he said. "Do

not think that I have asked you these details to esteem you more or less according to your birth and your condition. I wished to see whether you had any repugnance to telling the truth, and I see that you have none. I am infinitely grateful to you, and think you more noble from your character than we from our titles."

Consuelo smiled at the sincerity with which the old patrician admired her for making, without a blush, so easy a confession. There was in this surprise the remains of a prejudice all the stronger because Christian struggled nobly against it. It was evident that he was fighting with it and wished to conquer it.

"Now," he continued, "I am going to ask you a still more delicate question, my dear child, and I need all your indulgence to excuse my boldness."

"Fear nothing, my lord; I will reply to everything with as little embarrassment."

"Well, my child — you are not married?"

"No, my lord; not that I am aware."

"And — you are not a widow? You have no children?"

"I am not a widow, and I have no children," replied Consuelo, who had a strong desire to laugh, not knowing at what the count was aiming.

"In short," he went on, "you have not plighted your faith to any one; you are perfectly free?"

"Pardon me, my lord; I had plighted my faith, with the consent and even upon the order of my dying mother, to a youth whom I had loved from

childhood, and to whom I was betrothed up to the moment I left Venice."

"Therefore you are engaged?" said the count, with a singular mixture of disappointment and satisfaction.

"No, my lord, I am perfectly free," replied Consuelo. "He whom I loved broke his faith disgracefully, and I left him forever."

"So you loved him?" said the count, after a pause.

"With all my heart, it is true."

"And — perhaps you still love him?"

"No, my lord; that would be impossible."

"You would have no pleasure in seeing him again?"

"The sight of him would be torture to me."

"And you never allowed him — he never dared — but you will say that I am becoming offensive, and that I wish to know too much."

"I understand you, my lord, and since I am called upon to confess, and as I do not wish to gain your esteem unworthily, I will enable you to know to an iota whether I deserve it or not. We have often drunk from the same cup and reposed upon the same bench. He has slept in my room while I told my beads. He has watched me while I was ill. I did not guard myself with fear. We were always alone. We loved each other, we were to be married, we respected one another. I had sworn to my mother to be virtuous, and I kept my word. When he wished to cease to be my brother, without becoming my husband, I began to defend myself. When he was unfaithful to me I had reason to be glad that I defended

myself successfully. It will be easy for this man, who has no honor, to boast of the contrary ; it is a matter of small importance to a poor girl like me. So long as I sing correctly, they will ask for nothing more. So long as I can kiss without remorse the crucifix upon which I swore to my mother to be chaste, I shall not trouble myself much what they think of me. I have no family to disgrace, — no brothers, no cousins, to fight about me ” —

“ No brothers ? You have one.”

Consuelo was on the point of confiding the whole truth to the old count under a pledge of secrecy. But she was afraid of being cowardly in seeking outside of herself a refuge against him who had basely threatened her. She thought that she alone ought to have the firmness to defend herself and to rid herself of Anzoleto. Besides, the generosity of her heart shrank from the idea of causing a man whom she had loved so religiously to be driven out by her host. No matter what politeness Count Christian might employ in sending Anzoleto away, no matter how guilty the young Venetian might be, she had not the courage to subject him to so great a humiliation. She therefore replied to the old man’s question that she regarded her brother as a scattered-brained fellow and was accustomed to treat him only as a child.

“ But he is not bad ? ”

“ Perhaps he is bad,” she replied. “ I have as little to do with him as possible ; our characters and our ways of looking at things are very different. Your

lordship may have remarked that I was not very anxious to keep him here."

"It shall be as you choose, dear child; I believe you full of wisdom. Now that you have confided everything to me with such noble frankness"—

"Pardon me, my lord," said Consuelo, "I have not told you everything that concerns me because you have not asked me. I do not know the motive of that interest which you deign to take in my existence to-day. I presume that some one here has spoken of me in a more or less unfavorable manner, and that you wish to know if my presence does not dishonor your house. Thus far, as you have questioned me only on very superficial matters, I should have felt lacking in the modesty which befits my position by speaking to you of myself without your permission; but since you seem to wish to know me thoroughly, I must tell you a circumstance which may perhaps injure me in your opinion. Not only is it possible, as you have often said (though I have no desire for it now), that I may go upon the stage; but it is a fact that I made my debut in Venice last season under the name of Consuelo. They called me the Zingarella, and all Venice knows my face and my voice."

"Wait a moment!" cried the count, astounded at this sudden revelation. "Are you the marvel who created such a sensation in Venice last year, and whom the despatches from Italy frequently mentioned with such pompous eulogies? The most

beautiful voice, the finest talent within the memory of man" —

"Upon the stage of San-Samuel, my lord. The praise is no doubt much exaggerated ; but it is an incontestable fact that I am that same Consuelo, that I have sung in several operas and that I am an actress, in a word, or as they put it more politely, a cantatrice. You can see now whether I deserve to preserve your good-will."

"Here truly is an extraordinary thing and a strange destiny !" said the count, absorbed in his reflections. "Have you told all this to — to any one besides myself, my child ? "

"I have told it nearly all to the count, your son, my lord, though I have not entered into the details which you have just heard."

"So Albert knows your extraction, your old love, your profession ? "

"Yes, my lord."

"It is well, my dear signora. I cannot thank you too much for the admirable integrity of your conduct towards us, and I promise you that you shall not have cause to repent it. Now, Consuelo — (yes, I recollect that this is the name which Albert gave you at first, when he spoke to you in Spanish) allow me to collect my thoughts a little. I am deeply moved. We have still many things to say, my child, and you must pardon me a little emotion in approaching so grave a decision. Do me the goodness to wait here for a moment."

He went out, and Consuelo, following him with her eyes, saw him, through the gilded glass doors, go into his oratory and kneel there in fervent prayer.

Violently agitated, she tried in vain to conjecture the consequences of an interview which began so solemnly. She had at first thought that Anzoletto, while waiting for her, had in his ill-temper already done what he had threatened, — that he had talked with the chaplain or Hans, and that the manner in which he had spoken of her had raised grave scruples in the minds of her hosts. But Count Christian could not dissemble, and thus far his manner and his language indicated an increase of affection rather than the awakening of distrust. Besides, the frankness of her replies had struck him like unexpected revelations; the last, above all, had been a thunderbolt. And now he was praying, he was asking God to enlighten him or to support him in the accomplishment of a great resolution. “Will he ask me to go away with my brother? Will he offer me money?” she said to herself. “Ah, may God preserve me from that outrage! But no! This man is too delicate, too good-hearted, to think of humiliating me! What did he intend to say to me at first, and what will he say to me now? No doubt my long walk with his son has caused him to fear, and he is about to scold me. Perhaps I have deserved it, and I shall accept his lecture, not being able to reply frankly to the questions which would be put to me concerning Albert. This is a trying day, and if I have many like it I shall not be able to con-

test the palm for singing with Anzoletto's jealous mistresses. My breast is on fire and my throat scorched."

Count Christian soon returned to her, and his pale face bore the evidences of a victory won with a noble intention.

"My daughter," said he to Consuelo, as he sat down beside her after forcing her to keep the sumptuous chair which she wished to yield to him and upon which she was enthroned, in spite of herself, with a timid air, "it is time for me to reply by my own frankness to that which you have shown me. Consuelo, my son loves you."

Consuelo blushed and paled by turns. She tried to reply, but Christian interrupted her.

"It is not a question which I am asking you," said he; "I should not have that right, and you might not, perhaps, have the right to reply to it, for I know that you have not encouraged Albert's hopes in any way. He has told me all, and I believe him, because he has never lied, nor have I."

"Nor I, either," said Consuelo, raising her eyes to heaven with an expression of proud sincerity. "Count Albert must have told you, my lord" —

"That you had rejected all ideas of a union with him."

"It was my duty. I knew the customs and the ideas of the world; I knew that I was not made to be Count Albert's wife, for the very reason that I consider myself the inferior of no one before God, and

that I do not wish to receive grace and favor from any one before man."

"I know your just pride, Consuelo. I should think it exaggerated, if Albert had only himself to consider; but believing as you did that I should not approve such a match, you were right to reply as you did."

"Now, my lord," said Consuelo rising, "I understand the rest, and I beg you to spare me the humiliation which I dreaded. I will leave your house, as I would already have left it if I had thought I could do so without endangering the reason and the life of Count Albert, over which I have more influence than I could have wished. Since you know what I was not able to reveal to you, you can watch over him, prevent the consequences of this separation and resume a care which belongs to you rather than to me. If I assumed it rashly, it is a fault which God will pardon me, for he knows the purity of the sentiments which have guided me in all this."

"I know it," replied the count, "and God has spoken to my conscience as Albert spoke to my heart. Therefore remain seated, Consuelo, and do not be too hasty in condemning my intentions. It is not to order you to leave my house that I requested you to listen to me, but to beg you, with clasped hands, to remain here all your life."

"All my life!" repeated Consuelo, falling back upon her seat, divided between the happiness caused by this reparation to her dignity and the fright which

such an offer created. "All my life ! Your lordship does not think what he does me the honor to say to me."

"I have thought deeply of it, my daughter," replied the count, with a melancholy smile, "and I feel that I shall not have reason to repent of it. My son loves you passionately, and you have infinite power over his soul. It is you who restored him to me, you who went to seek him in a mysterious spot which he will not reveal to me, where no one but a mother or a saint, he says, would dare to venture. It is you who risked your life to save him from the solitude and the madness in which he was wasting away. It is through you that he has ceased to cause us frightful anxieties by his absences. It is you who have restored to him calmness, health, reason. For we must not deceive ourselves ; my poor boy was mad and he is so no longer. We passed almost the whole night talking together, and he displayed to me a wisdom superior to my own. I knew that you were to go out with him this morning. I had therefore authorized him to make you the request to which you have not been willing to listen. You were afraid of me, dear Consuelo ! You thought that old Rudolstadt, incrustated in his nobleman's prejudices, would be ashamed to owe to you his son. Well, you were mistaken. Old Rudolstadt has had pride and prejudices, no doubt ; perhaps he still has them, for he does not wish to assume a virtue before you ; but he abjures them, and with all the strength of a limitless

gratitude he thanks you for having restored to him his last, his only child."

As he said this, Count Christian took both of Consuelo's hands in his own and covered them with tears and kisses.

END OF VOLUME II.

